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The NELSON LEE

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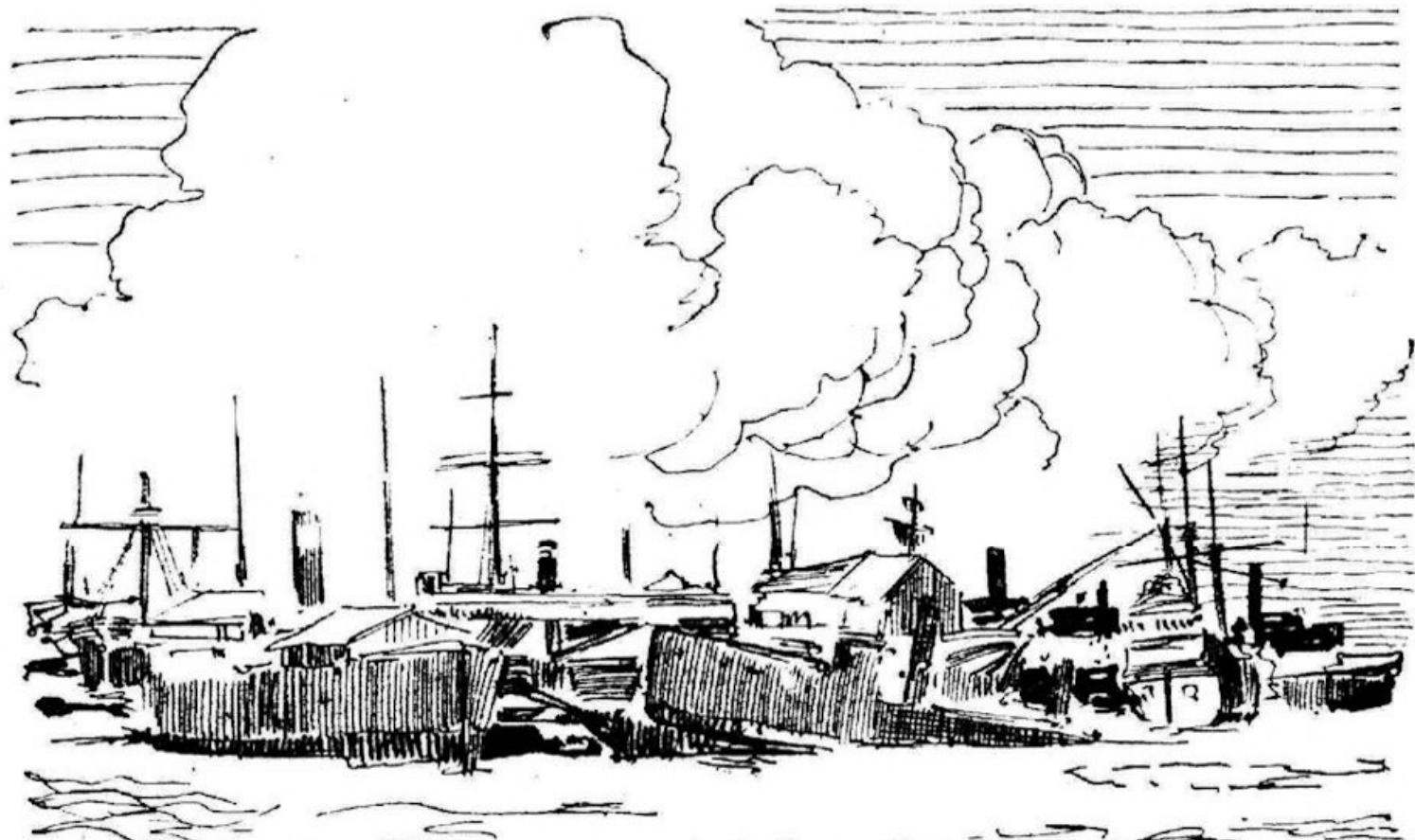


The
ISLAND
of
SHIPS!

New Series No. 25.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 12th, 1930.



The ISLAND of SHIPS!

CHAPTER 1.

The Derelict!

"NOT a sign of rain!" said Mr. Adams, second officer of the brig *Vulture*, as he stood against the poop rail, looking at the golden sunset. "And after the storm we've just had, the weather's likely to be settled for days."

Nelson Lee touched his companion on the arm.

"Not so loud, Mr. Adams," he murmured warningly. "No need to let the boys know how serious the position is."

"Sorry! I'd forgotten," said Mr. Adams.

"Although they'll have to know the worst soon enough," con-

tinued the famous detective. "Let them believe that rain will soon come, and that our water supply will be replenished. Besides, there is always the chance that we shall get showers."

Mr. Adams looked at the sunset again and compressed his lips.

"Not much of a chance," he said slowly.

The evening was well-nigh perfect. Scarcely a breath of wind blew, but what there was had a cooling touch. The day had been blazing hot, the sun beating down out of a cloudless sky. The *Vulture* was drifting somewhere in the Atlantic in a tropical zone.

Many hundred miles to the north-east, Lee believed, lay the Canary Islands. There weren't

A grand long complete yarn

By

S. B. HALSTEAD.



any means of making sure, for all the navigating instruments aboard the brig were out of commission. Perhaps they were drifting much, much farther to the west. They only knew that they were far out of the track of regular shipping, alone on this vast expanse of the ocean.

This was the second day they had drifted—the second day since Captain Blackford Angel and his rascally mate, Mr. Cragg, had deserted the ship with half the crew. The position was hourly becoming more serious.

Nelson Lee, as he stood on the poop, fell into a reverie. He idly wondered what was happening in London now; how his affairs were going. He had made no preparations, left no instructions. His lawyers, his bankers, everybody who had any dealings with him, must be wondering.

Neither Lee nor his six cub detectives were likely to forget the fateful night when they had been shanghaied and placed aboard this disreputable windjammer. Captain Angel had been only a tool in the affair; he had

Drifting, drifting . . . helpless in the entangled weed . . . trapped in the dreaded Sargasso Sea . . . little hope of rescue for Nelson Lee and his young assistants.

been paid to carry them off by an implacable enemy of Lee's—a man who, having escaped from prison, not only desired revenge, but a clear field in which to continue his nefarious work. Incidentally, this man, by a strange trick of chance, had been re-arrested only an hour after he had sent Nelson Lee and the boys off on their unwilling adventure.

The awakening had come—the knowledge that they were “before the mast.” Then the storm, with both the captain and the mate incapably drunk. Nelson Lee and Mr. Adams had done everything in their power, but the old tub had come through only at the cost of losing the greater part of her rotten gear. Her masts had practically gone, her rudder had dropped off and the storm had left her a drifting hulk. Only one boat remained sound, and in this the captain and the mate and most of the crew had stolen away during the night.

This would not have been so bad in itself. None of those who remained on the Vulture was sorry that those blackguards had gone. But the fresh water supply had gone with them.

After the storm it had been discovered that a considerable portion of the ship's stores had been ruined by sea water. Also, a large part of her water

supply had escaped, owing to bad storage. There had been sufficient, perhaps, to last a week.

Captain Angel, knowing full well that the brig might drift for several weeks before a sail was sighted, had taken that entire water supply with him. In the longboat, they could rig up a mast and a sail, and that water would last them a month. A month to find a shipping route—and rescue! Easy enough to say that the Vulture had foundered!

For those left on the brig, however, there was little or no chance!

“**H**ANGED if I can think of anything!” said Mr. Adams, after a while. “Even if we build a raft, what’s the good? We shall be worse off than ever. It’s a mighty unpleasant thought, Mr. Lee, but it seems to me that we shall just drift on until we all peg out—one after the other. Thirst’s a ghastly thing.”

“I know it—before now I have been lost in the Sahara,” replied Lee quietly. “And perhaps this kind of thirst—surrounded as we are by undrinkable water—is even worse. I’ve been wondering if we couldn’t distil some of it.”

“By Jove, that’s not a bad idea,” said the second officer eagerly. “How do you do it? Boil up the salt water and let the steam condense into something? Couldn’t we manage to fake up some sort of apparatus?”

“We shall have to try—it’s a matter of life or death for us,” said Nelson Lee. “Thank goodness we’ve got enough food. Pretty awful food, but it’s something. What do you make of our position, Mr. Adams?” he added abruptly.

“After that storm, there’s no telling where we were blown to,” said the other cautiously. “But we’re somewhere pretty tropical—and that means that we must have drifted considerably south. We may be within a hundred miles of a steamship route, or we may not.”

“You’re not very helpful,” smiled Lee dryly.

Nipper and Browne and Sir Montie Tregellis-West came up the poop ladder, and Nelson Lee and Mr. Adams changed their conversation. This lack of water was bad enough without discussing it in front of the boys.

“Notice how we’re drifting?” asked Mr. Adams. “There’s something about it I can’t quite understand. There must be an almighty strong current. You can’t actually see, but you can feel that we’re on the move all the time.”

“That’s what we came up to say, guv’nor,” explained Nipper. “It is rummy, isn’t it? That old Swedish sailor, Olsen, reckons that we’ve got into the west wind drift, and that as time goes on we shall move faster.”

“Towards where?” asked Lee curiously.

“Old Olsen seems to think that there’s a mysterious zone in this part of the Atlantic where we shall get completely lost,” replied

Nipper. “He says once we get fairly into it, there’s no possible escape.”

“Old sailors’ tales!” said Mr. Adams bluntly.

He was quite a young man; a tall, clean-limbed fellow with clear eyes. He had, indeed, always seemed out of place on this dirty old windjammer. Being a sailor of the new school, so to speak, he hadn’t much patience with the yarns that were told by the old-timers.

“The cook’s getting a meal of sorts ready,” remarked Nipper. “He’s in an awful stew about the water, though. It’s no good your trying to kid us, you know, guv’nor,” he went on, looking at Nelson Lee. “We all know how things stand.”

“Roughly, brothers, there’s about half a gallon left,” said William Napoleon Browne. “And half a gallon, in this climate, will go about as far as half a pint would at the North Pole. Not a cloud in the sky, and not an island in sight. Taking it all round, a pretty foul sort of prospect.”

“Perhaps the night will bring rain,” said Lee quietly.

But, in his heart, he knew that it wouldn’t. It was not difficult to see that the weather had set in for a fair spell; and in such a zone as this it was quite on the cards that there would be cloudless skies for several weeks running. Not that this would affect the adventurers. Two days was about the limit for them. If no water could be obtained by then they would certainly perish.

“Well, it’s no good talking about—”

Mr. Adams paused in the middle of his sentence, and a surprised look came into his eyes. He glanced sharply at Nelson Lee.

“Did you feel that?” he asked in a curious voice.

“I felt something,” replied Lee, walking to the rail, and looked overside.

“We hit something, didn’t we, sir?” asked Sir Montie.

“It wasn’t like that,” put in Mr. Adams. “It seemed to come from far, far below. A sort of concussion, as though there had been an earthquake on the sea bed.”

They stood there, intent and puzzled. For’ard, old Olsen, the Swede, had gone to the side with two of the other cubs. The cook had come out of his galley. Nobody spoke. There was a tense, expectant hush.

Except for the occasional creaking of old timbers, the silence was absolute. The sea was as calm as a millpond. The sun had just dipped down, and the heavens were filled with an intense golden glow, changing to vermilion in places.

Boom-oom!

“There it is again!” whispered Nipper, with a catch in his voice.

It was like the sound of a distant heavy gun—but it seemed to come from below. It was so faint and indistinct that some of them wondered if their ears had deceived them. Yet they had *felt* it, too.

“Look!” ejaculated Browne, pointing.

He pointed to the horizon over the star-board quarter. At first the others could not quite see what he meant; then they noticed that there was a long, whitish line in evidence, clearly distinguishable from the horizon. Even as they watched, it seemed to grow bigger—and to get nearer.

"Holy cats!" muttered Mr. Adams. "What the deuce can it be?"

"It's a tidal wave—and it's coming this way!" retorted Lee sharply. "Look lively, boys! Get below! Hey, you down there! Make a move—quickly! There's trouble coming!"

The air was filled with a low drumming sound. That white line, so vague at first, was now recognisable as a great mass of foaming sea, sweeping onwards with incredible speed.

"Cheese it, gov'nor!" protested Nipper. "Let's stay on deck. We want to see it!"

"You silly young idiot!" roared Lee. "It's death for anybody who stays on deck! Get below while there's time!"

"Right-oh, gov'nor!" gasped Nipper, startled.

"This is serious, Adams," muttered Lee, grasping the second officer's arm. "If we turn turtle it'll be the end."

"A bit quicker than we expected, eh?" said Mr. Adams quietly.

Although Nelson Lee had been shipped aboard the Vulture as a deck hand, he was now on an equality with Mr. Adams. Indeed, the young officer tacitly permitted Lee to take command.

The great foaming mass of water bore down upon the derelict with an ever-increasing roar. Lee was convinced that those booms had been caused by some volcanic eruption on the sea bed. This stupendous tidal wave was the result, and the Vulture was directly in its path.

All hands dashed aft into the saloon. The skylight was closed and battened down. All hatchways, portholes, and doors were secured.

"My hat!" panted Nipper, as he stood at one of the portholes.

Two or three of the other cubs were there, and they could see clearly. The tidal wave was nearly upon them. It seemed to Nipper that the crest of it towered hundreds of feet above the normal level of the ocean. It was like a gigantic wall of water, rushing onwards with the speed of an express train.

The air was filled with the booming thunder of it, and nothing could save the brig from being caught. If she happened to drift broadside on she would simply turn turtle at the first impact, and in all probability dive straight down to her doom. But if she was end on when the crisis came there was a chance—

"Hold tight!" shouted Nelson Lee urgently.

Nipper grabbed at something near the porthole. Astern, he could see the wall of water, seeming to reach almost to the sky

like a precipice. The next second the tidal wave was upon them!

CHAPTER 2.

The Amazing Awakening!

UP, up went the Vulture.

To those harassed souls on board it seemed that the end had come. The old timbers groaned, and the air was full of thunderous, confused sounds. The brig was picked up by the wave like a fragment of driftwood. For an eternity the Vulture appeared to hover on its very crest. The foaming sea crashed down upon her decks with appalling force. Water was pouring through the skylight hatch, which had been half smashed. Cascades were shooting down the companion. Then came the worst moment of all. The great wave passed on, leaving the brig to slide, almost sheer, down the giddy slope behind. It was a dreadful sensation.

"We're going!" gurgled Tommy Watson. "We're sinking to the bottom."

He was not the only one who thought this. There was a sudden violent jolt. The Vulture plunged down into the green waters, and for some moments she was indeed submerged. Then sluggishly, reluctantly, she bored her way up to the surface, and hundreds of tons of water poured from her decks in giant cascades. She had survived.

"A miracle!" muttered Mr. Adams. "I never dreamed we'd come through."

The cook, an elderly, leathery, wiry little man, was knocked out. He had slithered across the cabin and crashed his skull against a bulkhead. Fenton and Stevens were hurt, too. The rest had managed to escape with only a few bruises.

"Phew! That was pretty warm while it lasted," said Nipper breathlessly.

"I think it's safe on deck now," remarked Lee, as he prepared to render first aid. "Perhaps you'll look, Mr. Adams?"

The doors were unfastened, and when Mr. Adams went out on deck he found everything placid. But for the drenched condition of the entire ship, it was difficult to realise that such a dramatic thing had just happened.

"Well, we've come to no harm," said the second officer. "We were so smashed about already that there wasn't anything else to smash."

"Why, it's calm!" exclaimed Nipper, looking round. "There's some foam on the sea and the swell is a bit heavier, otherwise it's as calm as ever."

"But we seem to be drifting faster," said Tommy Watson. "My only hat! We're not just gliding along—we're racing!"

"Must be an illusion," muttered Nipper. If so, it was a very vivid illusion. As before, they could feel it rather than see it. They had an unmistakable impression that

the brig was being carried along at a great pace. It was difficult to determine, however, because the water was going with them. They were caught in a mighty current.

WITHIN an hour there wasn't the slightest trace of what had happened.

The tropical night had fallen, and a myriad of stars were gleaming overhead. The air was so utterly still that every tiny creak of the vessel sounded sharply. Her decks had dried by now, and the sea itself was as calm as ever. Mr. Adams had taken soundings, and he wasn't particularly pleased.

"She's taking in water," he reported to Nelson Lee. "Not much, but sufficient to make things uncomfortable for us if it keeps on. The old tub is as rotten as a worm-eaten carrot, and the wonder is that she didn't crack up completely. On the whole, she's done well."

"What about the pumps?"

"No good—never were," replied Mr. Adams. "If she fills up, she'll sink, and nothing we can do can save her. Still, she'll last for days yet, unless, of course, we hit another storm."

"We'd better all get to sleep," said Nelson Lee. "There's no telling what the morrow will bring, and there's really nothing to be gained by keeping a watch. Far better to sleep soundly until dawn, and then do what we can to conjure up some fresh water."

The boys were only too ready to turn in. After the excessive heat of the day they were all tired. Everybody was thirsty, but nobody grumbled.

Another dawn came.

Nelson Lee was the first out, but before he could reach the other end of the saloon Nipper appeared. Both were attired in their pyjamas, and they went out on deck together.

"I woke up like a shot as soon as I heard you, guv'nor," said Nipper. "I wanted to come out to have a look at the weather. My hat, what a morning! A cloudless sky and a blazing sun! I don't think I've ever hated the sun until now."

"The outlook is not very cheerful," admitted Lee, patting Nipper on the shoulder. "Still, we mustn't lose heart. There's no telling what might happen between now and—"

"Guv'nor," broke in Nipper excitedly, "look! What's happened to the sea? It's—it's different! I've never known it to be so rummy!"

They stood against the rail, staring.

An extraordinary change had come over the ocean during the night. Its greeny-blueness had gone, and it now seemed to be a murky, brownish black. Also, it was

uncannily still. It was like a dead sea, sullen, brooding with evil. Away on the horizon there was a haze. It was misty and indistinct. Nipper bent over the rail and stared down. Again he uttered a startled ejaculation.

"Look down there, sir!" he muttered. "Can you see them, too? Great long ropes of a brownish-yellow something. What is it?"

"Weed!" replied Lee grimly.

"Weed? Do you mean seaweed, guv'nor?"

"Not the seaweed that you and I are familiar with, but something of a totally different nature," replied Nelson Lee. "Now I can understand the reason for the sea's changed appearance. It is choked with this weed, which floats just below the surface. Heaven alone knows how far down it extends."

They continued to stare, Nipper fascinated.

"They seem to be as thick round as a man's body, sir!" he exclaimed. "Great long tentacles, like gigantic hosepipes. And I can see leaves, too—great things over twelve feet across."

"Either this is deep sea weed, torn from the ocean bed by the earthquake of last night—or something else," replied Lee slowly.

"What do you mean, sir—something else?"

"I have an idea that this is surface weed, after all," said Lee. "But it's not often that men see it like this. Sargasso weed, Nipper. There is every indication that we are not only in very close proximity to the Sargasso Sea, but that we are actually drifting deeply into it!"

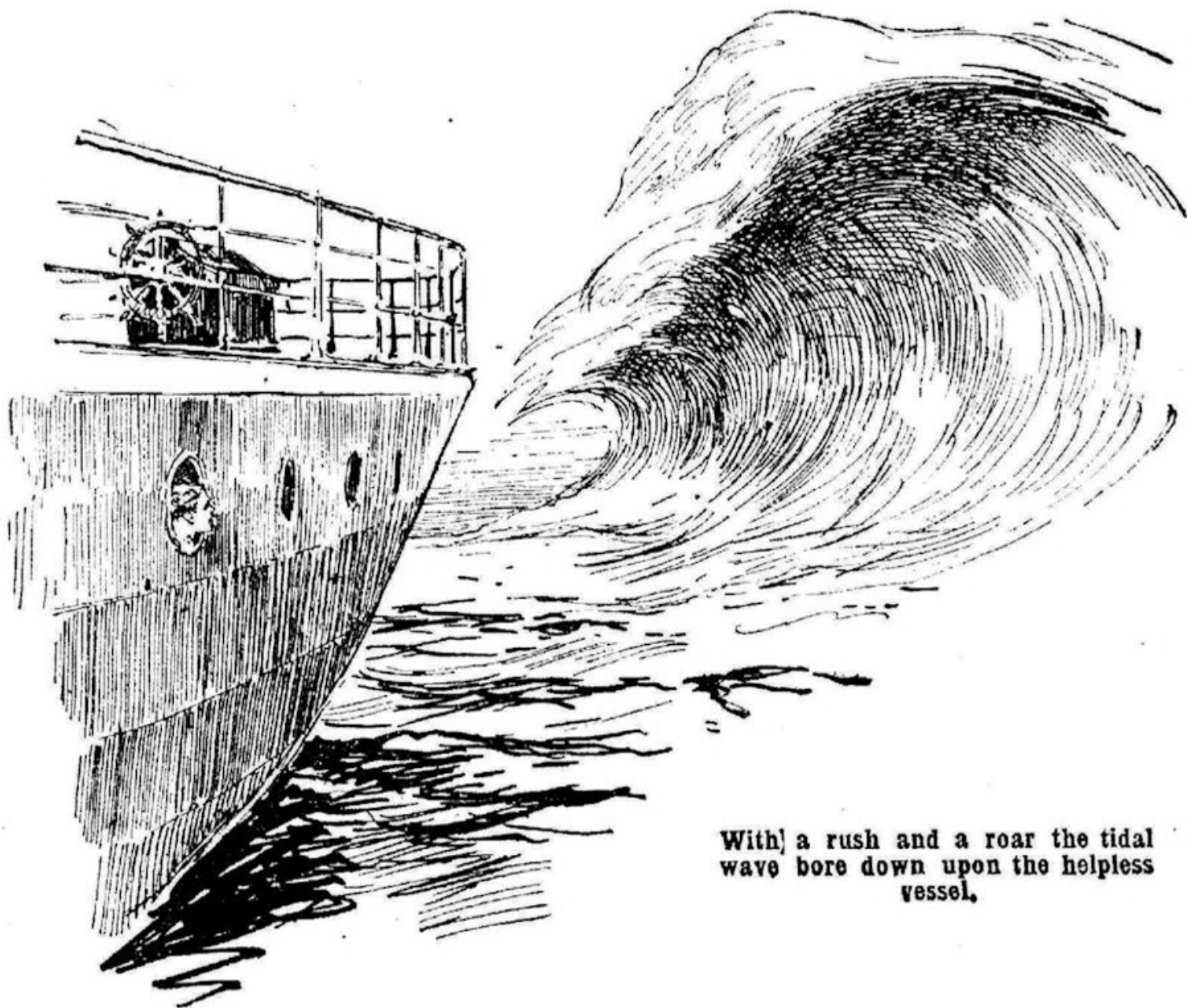
"The Sargasso Sea!" muttered Nipper—and there was a note of horror in his voice.

WHEN the others came on deck they could talk of nothing but the strange phenomenon. Mr. Adams, at first, was sceptical; but he soon changed his mind, particularly when it was more than evident that the Vulture was still drifting. For the farther she drifted, the denser became the weed. Yet there were indications that the weed was comparatively sparse in the immediate vicinity of the ship. At some distance on either side it seemed to be much thicker.

"There's really nothing in this talk about the Sargasso Sea, is there?" asked Mr. Adams bluntly. "You've had a lot of experience, Mr. Lee, and you know a heap more than I do. I'm a raw hand, and I've never really worked on the Atlantic service."

"Many people think that the Sargasso Sea is a myth," replied Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "I know differently because I have seen it before. The reason why so many modern sailormen discount the existence of such a spot is that all modern ships avoid it."

"Thus, the average sailor never sees anything to substantiate the yarns he hears from the old seadogs. No steamer ever deliberately passes nearer than the mere fringe of the weed. There aren't many ocean-going



With a rush and a roar the tidal wave bore down upon the helpless vessel.

sailing vessels afloat now; and the few that do use the Atlantic take care to give this zone a wide berth. We only got into it because of Captain Angel's incompetence as a navigator and because we drifted for many hundreds of miles in a rudderless condition after the storm."

"But this Sargasso Sea, sir?" asked Fenton eagerly.

"It's rather difficult to describe," replied Nelson Lee. "Really, it's a sort of back-water, or eddy, of all the big Atlantic currents. These currents are quite normal on the fringes of the actual zone, but beyond a certain point they act differently; they begin to draw things inwards. It is a slow but irresistible force—like a magnet sucking everything towards it.

"Derelicts—as you know yourself, Mr. Adams—have been known to float for three or four years in the Atlantic, a menace to shipping, sighted by this vessel, reported by that, but always elusive. Such derelicts may travel for thousands of miles before they are found and sunk—or before they get inevitably drawn into the vortex of the Sargasso Sea."

"But if it's just water, sir, they sink anyhow in time," remarked Stevens.

"It isn't just water," replied Nelson Lee. "Try to imagine an ordinary basin full of

water. I dare say you've done the thing many times as children. Drop all sorts of odds and ends into that basin—after you have stirred the water into a swift rotary motion with a stick. What happens? All those match-ends and scraps of paper are drawn towards the centre, and when the water becomes still every tiny atom of floating material forms a compact little mass in the centre."

"That's true, gov'nor," said Nipper.

"Well, the Atlantic Ocean is our basin now," said Nelson Lee. "Like the movement set up by your piece of stick in the basin, the well-known Atlantic currents create the irresistible rotary motion. Owing to the more or less stagnant condition of the centre of this vortex, weed grows—coarse, dank seaweed such as is found in no other part of the world. Hulks and derelicts get out of the main currents, and drift into this place of dead shipping. Many sink, but others get jammed in the weed and remain afloat. It is even said that Spanish galleons are still to be found. And you mustn't forget that all other kinds of flotsam and jetsam get drawn in—tree trunks from the Amazon River, and so forth. Once a ship gets fairly caught in that tangle, there is no escape for it. That's why people who go to the Sargasso seldom—if ever—come back. It is a kind of one-way street; easy enough to

enter, but well-nigh impossible to get out of."

Tommy Watson looked pale.

"Then—then if we get drawn in, we might never get out, sir?" he asked huskily.

"We're not in yet, young 'un," replied Lee. "Some trick of the current may save us. It is said that the Gulf Stream encircles the Atlantic Ocean in a sort of mighty whirlpool. The centre of that whirlpool is this region of the Sargasso Sea. For hundreds of years wrecks have been collecting—ever since the first Spanish vessel essayed the adventure of the Atlantic crossing."

They all stood there, looking out across the dull, drab expanse. A change had come over the sky during the past hour or so; its former blueness had become dull and leaden. The sun looked hazy. An utter and dreary silence brooded over the great wastes.

"Look over there, gov'nor," said Nipper, pointing. "Some of the weed is so thick that it's projecting from the surface."

"Yes, I see."

"And we're passing it, sir. Do you understand? *Passing it!*"

"Upon my word, young 'un, you're right," said Lee sharply. "Here, Adams! Look at this! Have you got your glasses handy?"

Nelson Lee was intent; and Nipper, at least, knew that the famous detective was freshly anxious. There was something here he didn't like.

What Nipper said was true. The brig, drifting together with dense masses of weed, was passing—and rapidly passing—the even denser masses. There was something rather frightening in the speed that the Vulture had now attained. She was being drawn inwards towards the central zone—drawn as though by a magnet, just as Nelson Lee had said.

"Don't like the look of it," murmured Mr. Adams.

"I think there's only one explanation," replied Nelson Lee. "That submarine earthquake, and the resultant tidal wave, caused an unprecedented upheaval in the Sargasso Sea. The weed was split for hundreds of miles—but inevitably it must close again."

"And we're being sucked into that—fracture, shall we say?"

"The vortex is drawing us," replied Lee. "We're in the freshly-opened channel. These densely packed banks of weed on either side represent the normal growth. This weed all about us is loosened and torn, so it drifts with us."

It was some moments before Mr. Adams spoke.

"Then, bluntly, it means that we're heading for the very heart of the Sargasso?" he asked. "And after we've got there, the weed will close right in and seal us up? Is that what you mean, Mr. Lee?"

"That is exactly what I mean!" replied the great detective quietly.

CHAPTER 3.

Trapped in the Weed!

IT was impossible to keep the facts from the boys, and from Olsen and the other members of the crew. They all had to know.

"My hat! We're in a nasty mess!" grunted Nipper, when he and the other cub detectives discussed the situation. "While we were drifting in the open sea we did have a chance of spotting a ship. But here——" and he broke off significantly.

"If only we could get water!" muttered Watson. "That's the horror of it! There's no chance of rain here—not by the look of the sky. And how else can we get fresh water?"

Nelson Lee and Mr. Adams were discussing the same subject on the poop.

"All our chances of rain have gone, old man," said Lee quietly. "As this is a vortex for the ocean, so it is for the clouds. In some manner which I cannot explain—but which is nevertheless a fact—the Atlantic storms always circle round this zone."

"You mean that if a storm comes over the Sargasso, or towards it, it gets turned off, Mr. Lee?"

"I believe that this region is absolutely windless, and the deeper we go into it the less will be the chances of rain," replied the detective. "You see, the whole atmosphere has changed already. It is heavy, moist, clammy. It's like a hothouse, or the interior of a jungle swamp. There's not a breath of air. And overhead the haze is growing—an everlasting mist, through which the sun can only just penetrate."

"Ugh!" muttered Mr. Adams, shuddering. "Makes me feel creepy."

"Yes, it has that effect on one," admitted Lee.

"If it's bad now, what about to-night?" asked the other. "This awful weed! It's closing in already! Look, sir! That bank over to starboard is no farther off than half a mile now. Two hours ago it was three miles away."

It was the same on the port side. As the brig drifted, the channel narrowed. Either that, or the channel was closing up. Gradually, insidiously, the changes came. Deeper masses of weed—more haze—a greater humidity. Never could the adventurers shake off the feeling that they were in a dead world. There was no glory of the ocean here; the ocean had become a thing of stark hideousness.

Under normal conditions the situation would have been bad. But this appalling heat was increasing the thirsts of the unhappy castaways. The last drop of water had gone—had been served round at mid-day. There would have been no sense in keeping it, for it would only have evaporated. They had had a tiny half-cupful each, a mere drop which only increased their pangs.

Very little was said. What was the good of grumbling or wailing? For the most part they lounged about on deck, leaning on the rail, watching the dreary weedscape. By now they were almost completely hemmed in by the weed. It was yellow, spongy-looking stuff—yellow and brown and green and black. In places it was massed up into great heaps, so that the weed formed an undulating panorama of little hills and valleys.

It was getting towards evening when Browne made an extraordinary discovery. He suddenly grasped at Stevens' arm and pointed over the port quarter.

"Correct me if I am mistaken, Brother Horace," he said, his voice curiously unsteady, "but do I, or do I not, see a monkey?"

Stevens stared.

"A monkey?" he repeated, in amazement.

"A monkey," said Browne firmly, staring. "In fact, two monkeys."

"Old man, you're ill," said Stevens. "It's the thirst, I expect—"

"A Browne does not succumb to thirst so easily, brother," interrupted William Napoleon coldly. "I would remind you that I am still in possession of my full faculties, although I must confess that my throat feels like the inside of a brick kiln in full blast. And when I tell you that I see two monkeys, I am not suffering from an hallucination. At least, I hope not," he added doubtfully.

He pointed, and Stevens stared hard.

"Great Scott! There *is* something," he said excitedly.

Nelson Lee came over.

"Allow me, sir!" said Browne politely. He seized Lee's binoculars and levelled them. "Monkeys," he went on triumphantly. "And, by the great panjandrum, they're drinking. Do you hear that? Drinking! Ring out the joy-bells forthwith!"

"Are you insane, Browne?" asked Lee sharply.

"Gaze, brother—gaze!" said Browne. "And let us thank our stars that the Sargasso Sea gripped us for its own. For

water is at hand, and it certainly wouldn't have been if we had kept to the open sea."

Lee was gazing through the glasses, and he was startled to find that Browne's statement was correct. On one of those hummocks of weed he could distinctly see two smallish monkeys, their tails gripped round the slimy tendrils. The little creatures were tearing open some of the cup-like protuberances of the weed—and drinking.

"By James!" breathed Nelson Lee. "Mr. Adams! I don't pretend to know how these monkeys got here, but the rest is quite logical. This atmosphere is heavy

with moisture. Without doubt this mist condenses into the cup-like growths of the weed. Whilst thriving on salt water, they collect fresh water. It might mean our salvation."

The excitement was intense when the news got round, which it did within a minute or two. Some of the juniors wanted to swim across to the nearer bank of weed at once, but Lee forbade them.

"That would be madness," he said. "No swimmer could exist in these waters, for he would become entangled in the weed and be dragged under. And how do we know that the water is safe in other ways? There may be hideous sea creatures lurking in its depths. No, there must be no swimming."

On one side the bank of weed was so near that by utilising some of the old spars they could reach it. The spars were used as grappling-hooks, and as the brig drifted by great clumps of the weed were dragged aboard.

It was a tense moment when they first examined the ugly, spongy cups which grew like hideous flowers in profusion. Pulling back the leathery petals, Nelson Lee uttered an exclamation. There, buried deeply in the thing, was a pool of water.

"Taste it, sir!" urged Nipper hoarsely.

Lee did so.

"It is fresh," he said quietly. "Slightly acrid, owing to its contact with this weed, but I have no doubt that it is pure and wholesome."

Look At This— And Don't Blink!

It's only Dick Daring of Skinton School—he's giving his chums a ride on his pet. A dinosaur, you know. S'fact! Extraordinary—yes, but the grand new series of stories featuring Dick and Dusty, his pet dinosaur, are extraordinary. Funny, too. You'll read 'em, and then want to read 'em again.

Look out for Dick and Dusty next Wednesday, chums!



DICK and his DINOSAUR

IT was remarkable how things had turned out. It had seemed disastrous for the Vulture to be caught in the entangling grip of the Sargasso weed, but this very disaster had brought salvation to the thirsty adventurers.

By working hard they dragged mass after mass of the weed aboard. They collected the precious fresh water. Long before nightfall they had gained a supply of several gallons. The weed, when robbed of its priceless fluid, was flung overboard again. Glad they were to get rid of it, too. For they found that it was swarming with queer creatures. Hideous little water beetles, not unlike miniature crabs, squirmy things which might or might not sting.

Chips, the cook, was joyous. He gave no thought to the future. He had water, and he could brew tea and prepare meals once again. He set about providing an evening meal which he would be proud of. After their first drink—which they had not been able to resist—Nelson Lee considered it advisable to boil all the water. It was better to be on the safe side.

So happy were they all about this discovery that their main position did not trouble them so much. Their relief was enormous. With their thirsts quenched, they felt that they could face any ordeal with brave hearts.

And there was something indescribably strong in Nelson Lee. He dominated them all, even Mr. Adams. His powerful personality made itself felt more than ever in this crisis. He persisted in remaining cheerful, laughing and joking, and taking things lightly. All the others responded.

"Well, boys, we're having quite a little adventure, after all," said Nelson Lee, as they stood by the rail, waiting for the welcome sound of the gong. "Rather a change from our usual work in London, eh?"

"Even this is better than being under the bullying thumb of Captain Angel and that brute, Cragg, sir," said Nipper. "As for being trapped in this weed, there's bound to be a way out."

"Let's hope so," replied Lee lightly.

He masked his real fears. The Sargasso Sea was a dreaded zone, and well he knew it. Even now, with the weed packing tightly on either hand, the Vulture was still drifting. She was still being drawn towards the centre of that mysterious vortex.

The sun was setting, but there was no sign of the actual orb. Merely a golden, reddish glow in the thick haze towards the westward. On every other side the weed and the sky were merged in the haze.

Soon after the sun had set there came a very rapid change. The haze increased to a thick mist. It appeared as though by magic, rolling over the weed in swirling billows. At times a cloud of mist would drift completely over the brig, blotting out everything for a moment.

Nipper shivered

"I was hoping for a relief from the steamy heat, but I didn't want this," he said. "It feels horrid. It makes a chap shudder. By Jove, this'll be a rotten place in the dead of night!"

THE welcome sound of the cook's gong sent them tumbling down into the saloon.

Chips really had excelled himself. Nobody asked questions about the exact contents of the stew which he had conjured up. Bully beef and baked beans were the main ingredients, but the whole concoction was savoury and satisfying. There was plenty of piping hot tea, too, and muffins to follow.

They all sat round the improvised table in the saloon. The rest of the ship was left to itself. Old Olsen, at first, was thoroughly uncomfortable. He was a true old salt—a fo'c'sle hand in every inch of him—but soon he grew more comfortable, made so by the friendliness of the others.

"Well, we can get a good sleep to-night, and hope for the best to-morrow," said Mr. Adams, as he leisurely filled his pipe. "After all, life isn't so bad. There's no fear of a storm, anyhow. We've got plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and, thank the stars, a good supply of tobacco!"

"And as for getting out of this mess—well, we must trust to luck, I suppose," said Lee dryly. "You boys had better get to sleep as soon as you can."

"Inadvisable, dear Chief, to retire immediately after a heavy meal," said Browne. "I would suggest a brief walk on the promenade deck—"

"No," interrupted Lee, his manner changing. "I'd rather you didn't."

"Rather we didn't go on deck, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Not until the morning."

"By Jove! Do you think there's any danger, sir?" asked Fenton.

"I don't know—that's just the point," said Lee. "But why take unnecessary risks? This weed is queer stuff. Don't forget we are a mere floating hulk. Who knows but what strange and monstrous creatures may appear after the daylight has gone?"

"Well, let's have one look, sir," urged Nipper. "You can come on deck with us, and we'll turn in immediately afterwards."

Lee thought it better to humour them. Going on deck they found the night as black as pitch. The mist had cleared now. The air was comparatively clear, but there were no stars visible overhead. A tense, uncanny silence brooded over everything. Not even a creak came from the crippled ship.

"It's—it's eerie!" whispered Tommy Watson.

"Begad, it's more than that," said Tregellis-West. "I mean, it's hard to realise we're at sea at all. There's no motion—no sound—not even the whisper of a ripple. Frightfully disturbin', dear old boy."

The air was full of a strangely unpleasant odour. No doubt this came from the weed. It was reminiscent of rotting vegetation—dank, unhealthy and suggestive of fever.

"Listen!" whispered Nipper.

Everybody became silent. Their hearts began beating rather more rapidly. Was it imagination, or were they mistaken about the silence? For their strained ears seemed to pick up vague sounds of shuffling—mysterious sounds which came from the banks of weed on either side. Shuffling, slithering, and now and again a gurgling sound. To their keyed-up imaginations it almost appeared that the weed was full of a horrible living movement.

CHAPTER 4.

The Figure in the Night!

MR. ADAMS had allowed his pipe to go out.

"Infernal hole!" he muttered uneasily. "Ugh! Gives me the shivers, sir. I've been in a few unpleasant places in my life, but this beats everything."

"It is certainly unpleasant," agreed Nelson Lee. "But you must remember, old man, that our imaginations are liable to work overtime under these conditions. This haze, and the absence of any starlight, contributes towards the sense of mystery."

"What about these sounds we keep hearing?" asked the second officer. "I can almost see monstrous creatures creeping over the weed towards us—"

"Then you can see more than I can," interrupted Lee briskly. "What you need, my lad, is sleep! These sounds are nothing but the gurglings of the water through the choking masses of weed. The windless night and the intense blackness do the rest. Come! We'd better get below."

"About those monkeys, sir," came Fenton's voice from near by.

"We have to thank them, Fenton, for giving us the tip about the fresh water," said Nelson Lee. "It was lucky that Browne spotted—"

"I know that, sir; but how do you explain the monkeys?" interrupted Fenton bluntly. "We're not duffers, sir. And we know jolly well that monkeys don't naturally thrive in a region of seaweed. Where did they come from?"

"It's a nice problem, old man," said Lee slowly. "But I think I can suggest a feasible explanation. Wrecks and derelicts of all kinds are drawn irresistibly into this noxious whirlpool—and monkeys are favourite pets among sailormen."

"You mean that some of these pets might have been left on the derelict ships, sir?" asked Fenton. "That they were abandoned to their fate?"

"That's not very likely," put in Mr. Adams, out of the darkness. "Sailormen don't abandon their pets as a rule."

"They are forced to on occasions," argued

Lee. "Again, it is quite possible that a ship with a cargo of monkeys was abandoned owing to fire or some other calamity. Some of the creatures survived, and arrived here. Plenty of food, remember, on abandoned ships. Perhaps not fit for human consumption, but good enough for monkeys. There might be thousands of the creatures on this weed, for there is more than a chance that they have been breeding for years."

"Yes, and monkeys are handy little beggars—they might even provide us with grub if the worst comes to the worst," said Mr. Adams drily. "I've heard that monkey flesh is quite palatable."

"Let's hope it won't come to that," replied Lee. "We've got enough stores aboard to last us for a month or two—"

He broke off abruptly. His fingers tightened on the rail. He stared fixedly into the Stygian darkness. Although Mr. Adams couldn't see, he sensed that Nelson Lee had been attracted by something.

"What is it, sir?" he whispered.

"I'm a fool, I suppose," muttered Lee; "but I can swear that I saw— There! Look, Adams! Can't you see—"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" panted the other.

For a flash they both saw—or thought they saw—a glimpse of a yellowish glow. It was far away in the distance, almost like the light from a hand lantern. It vanished so quickly, however, that the two men wondered if their eyesight had played them false.

"Funny!" breathed Mr. Adams. "The boys don't seem to have seen anything."

"No doubt they were looking in a different direction, or down at the weed," whispered Lee. "Don't say anything, old son. Perhaps we were mistaken."

"I can't believe it," said the other. "A sort of glow—several miles away. That's what you saw, isn't it?"

"Yes, but only for a flash," replied the detective. "It may have been caused by a fish or some other creature. Phosphorescence, you understand?"

"Let's get below," said Mr. Adams, with a shiver.

Thud-thud-thud!

Far away in the distance a curious sound made itself apparent. It was like a dull hammering, slow and penetrating.

"What was that?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Nothing," replied Lee. "At least, nothing that hasn't a perfectly logical explanation. Hidden gases in the weed causing some of the growth to burst, perhaps. I really think, boys, that we'd better get to bed. This darkness is rather nerve-trying."

As they went below Nelson Lee could have sworn he heard a slow, slithering sound close at hand—as though some monstrous object was pushing its way along the starboard side of the vessel. He was the last one to descend the companion, and he was glad that the others had not heard.

He took care to close the hatch securely and to lock it. After that he bolted the saloon doors, and saw that all the ports were fastened. It was better to be on the safe side.

Under the cheery glow of the saloon lamp the adventurers lost their sense of uneasiness. The boys went to bed at once. Blankets were spread on the floor, and without troubling to undress, they lay down on these. Sleep came to them quickly, for they were all tired out.

The men slept, too. Nelson Lee and Mr. Adams were the last to turn in. There wasn't much sense in keeping a watch. In any case, Nelson Lee felt he could trust himself to awaken at the slightest sound, and if there was any danger he would be ready.

ABOUT an hour later Nipper found himself awake.

He could not quite understand what had aroused him. The lamp was turned down, and only a soft glow radiated through the saloon. Everybody else was asleep.

Tap-tap-tap!

Nipper started. Almost against his head sounded a curious tapping noise, sharp and insistent. But it was very faint. As he was lying some distance apart from the others, with his head against the wall, he heard the queer sounds distinctly. They were not loud enough to disturb anybody else.

"My only hat!" breathed Nipper.

A queer tingling sensation ran up and down his spine. What was it—outside? It seemed to him that something was working its way along the ship's side, tapping occasionally to guide itself, or perhaps to ascertain what manner of object this new arrival was.

Anyhow, it was decidedly uncanny. Nipper was not the kind of fellow to get scared, and he decided to creep out on deck and have a look round. Without a sound he left his blankets. He was wearing no shoes so he made no sound as he crept towards the door. Nelson Lee was sleeping soundly—in fact, far more soundly than usual.

The fact was, Lee had had a strenuous time of late. Before the Vulture had become a hulk he had remained on duty for forty-eight hours on end—and nature, after all, demands her penalties. While assuring himself that he was fit, Lee was nevertheless in sore need of sleep. This was one of those rare occasions when he was not likely to awaken at a slight sound.

"Good old gov'nor!" breathed Nipper, as he reached the door. "Sleeping the sleep of the just! I wouldn't disturb him for worlds!"

Cautiously, silently, he unbolted the door, and having made sure that he had a box of matches on him, he crept out. He longed for his electric torch, but the battery of this had long since given up the ghost.

At the top of the companion he unfastened the latch and quietly emerged. He took care to leave the hatch open, so that he

could bolt back in case of emergency, and he was firmly resolved not to stray far from the companionway.

He stood still, listening.

He heard whisperings and gurglings, just the same as before—the weed, of course—and then there was that tapping sound again. It came from somewhere on the starboard side now—well for'ard.

"A bit of old wreckage bumping against the side, I suppose," muttered Nipper. "Go back to bed, you imaginative idiot! This sort of thing won't do you any good!"

He could see nothing. The blackness was more intense than ever. He struck the match, and for a moment he was blinded. He held the lighted match far above his head and stared round him. The flame burned evenly, for there was not a breath of wind. He saw the familiar objects on the deck, and he moved towards the rail. Out beyond there was the weed—

And then he saw something else; something which brought a gasp of stupefied amazement to his lips. In that moment he felt that he must be suffering from some preposterous delusion.

A figure had moved round the end of a half-demolished deckhouse, about six or seven yards away from Nipper. He saw it out of the corner of his eye at first, and, startled, he turned. For a few vivid seconds he saw the figure clearly defined.

There was nothing ghastly or horrible about it. Quite the contrary. For what Nipper beheld was the slim form of a young girl! The shock of the apparition was so great that he nearly dropped the match.

Clearly he saw her—a girl of perhaps fifteen, with a pale, wistful face. Her eyes were round and open, looking at him in a half-frightened, half-amused way. He caught a glimpse of slim limbs. She appeared to be wearing a costume made from some sort of wild rushes. Her hair was long, and it fell over her shoulders in a mass of wavy tresses.

Then the match went out. It burned Nipper's fingers, but he did not even notice. The blackness, after that yellow light, was all the more intense. The youngster stood as though rooted to the deck; his heart was racing madly.

What was this unbelievable thing? A girl—here. Actually on board the derelict! He shook himself. Fool! He must be dreaming! It was impossible that he could really have seen—

Frantically, he struck another match. As the flame blazed out he heard a little gasp of surprise. He saw her figure flash through the air as she leapt clean overside in a graceful dive. A soft, silvery laugh came to his ears.

Nipper awoke from his trance. He knew now that he was not dreaming. His vision might have played him false, but it was incredible to suppose that his hearing had tricked him, too. He could hear that laugh still ringing in his ears—and the dull splash

as the strange vision had dropped into the weed-choked water.

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Nipper amazedly. He ran to the rail, and, holding the match aloft, stared. "I say! Who are you?" he asked tensely. "It's all right! You won't come to any harm—"

He broke off, feeling ridiculous. There was nothing. He could see the foul-looking weed, and, here and there, the black water. He had a feeling that he was talking to the thin air. A doubt again assailed him. Was he merely making a fool of himself? The whole thing was so extraordinary that he was fully justified in believing that it was all a dream.

And then came the absolute proof — the final, definite evidence that all this had happened. A scream came from the weed. It was a frightened, half-choked scream. Its note was one of untold terror.

"Help!" came a desperate cry.

Nipper was galvanised into activity. Without a thought for the dangers, he jumped upon the rail and dived!

CHAPTER 5.

The Isle of Hulks!

SPLASH!

Nipper struck the water clumsily, and his first sensation was one of astonishment. For the water was warm, and different from what he had expected. It was almost like dropping into a tepid bath. He felt something gripping his left ankle, and holding it.

It was a ghastly sensation—until he realised that his foot had merely become entangled in a tendril of the tough, rope-like weed. He managed to shake himself free and struck out again. He knew that the heavy banks of congested weed were close at hand.

Another cry came to his ears. It had a panting note in it, as though the girl was



Nipper struck a match . . . to his amazement he saw a girl dive over the side of the ship.

struggling. Desperately, he swam on, and then felt the soft, spongy masses of the thick weed in front of him. He hauled himself up.

Until now he had believed that the weed would not support the weight of a human being—that it was a treacherous mass which would engulf any venturesome mortal. He found that his weight was not only supported, but that it was comparatively easy to make progress over the stuff.

He plunged on, feeling the spongy substance giving at every step; but it sprang back, almost like india-rubber. Only a few gurglings came from its depths. The blackness confused him, and for the first time he felt that he was on a hopeless mission.

Then he heard sounds from behind him. Footsteps—voices. A light appeared, but he did not turn round. The light enabled him to see, twenty feet farther on, the struggling figure of the girl.

"Nipper," came an urgent shout, "what are you doing? — Come back, you young idiot! Have you gone mad?"

"Nipper!" came another chorus.

He hardly heard. Three great leaps had taken him to the girl's side. He was almost beyond the radius of the light, but it was just sufficient. He could see her in a ghostly, unreal kind of way. Then, for the first time, he saw something else.

A monstrous, crab-like creature—or perhaps it was more akin to a lobster. It was of a mottled colour, brownish and black. Nipper caught a glimpse of a wicked eye, and he saw that the girl was tightly gripped by her dress. A great claw was clutching at it.

"Oh, help—please! It's got me!" came a faint whisper.

Nipper, his heart racing, grabbed at the giant claw. Using all his strength, he forced the nippers apart. As he did so, another great fearsome leg reached out for him, and only in the nick of time did he dodge. The girl reeled away, half fell, and then found her feet.

"Thank you!" came a whisper.

Nipper spun round, leaping away from the hideous weed monster. His quick wits had already told him that it was not capable of rapid movement. The girl must have accidentally run into it, or she would never have been caught.

"I say——" he began.

He blinked. There was no sign of her. She had vanished completely into the outer blackness. But her voice still quivered in his ears, and he could remember the expression of gratitude in her eyes.

"Nipper!" came a shout from behind.

He was brought to himself with a jerk. The weed creature was moving; a long tentacle was squirming its way out of the water. Nipper backed away. Over to his left he saw another of the crab-like things.

He ran clumsily over the spongy surface, plunged into the water, and reached the Vulture's side. Ropes were trailing down, and he seized them and hauled himself up. He found Nelson Lee waiting—a grim-faced Nelson Lee, with eyes that expressed anger and anxiety.

"What insanity is this, Nipper?" asked Lee sternly.

"Didn't—didn't you see, guv'nor?" panted Nipper.

"See what?"

"That girl and——"

"Girl!" broke in the detective sharply. "What are you talking about? Upon my soul! Have you gone out of your mind, young 'un? Girl! There's no girl here! How could there be a girl in this waste?"

Nipper, dripping wet, strove to collect his thoughts. It was evident from what Nelson Lee had just said that the recent incident had occurred beyond the range of the light—which was one of the cabin lamps. Or perhaps the detective and the others had been dazzled by the light, and had thus been

unable to penetrate the blackness beyond. Anyhow, they hadn't seen.

"We thought you'd been seized by some horrible monster," said Watson breathlessly. "What were you doing out there, Nipper? — And what's that you were saying about a girl? You silly ass! You must have been dreaming!"

"Perhaps I was," said Nipper slowly.

"You'd better pull yourself together, young man," put in Nelson Lee. "I heard the splash as you dived in, and when I saw that you were missing I came up. I'm rather sorry I disturbed the others——"

"It's a good thing you brought that lamp up, guv'nor," interrupted Nipper. "You came just at the right moment. I was able to save that girl from a horrible crab-like thing. The biggest I've ever seen! It must have measured five or six feet across. Fortunately, it didn't seem to have much speed, or I shouldn't have got back."

He could see them all looking at him with anxious eyes.

"I confess," said Browne sadly, "that I had my doubts regarding that stew, but never did I suspect that it would react so swiftly and strangely. Brother Nipper, I venture to suggest that you have been seeing things."

"I don't expect you to believe me, but I heard a queer sort of tapping against the ship's side," explained Nipper. "I came on deck and struck a match, and what do you think I saw? A jolly pretty girl, dressed in some sort of reed-costume, with long wavy hair."

"Mad as a hatter!" said Watson anxiously.

"She dived overboard, and then I heard a cry," continued Nipper. "What does it mean, guv'nor? She spoke English. Dashed good English, too—in one of the loveliest voices you ever heard."

Nelson Lee looked at him very steadily.

"You don't seem out of your mind, young 'un, but what you have been saying is so fantastic that I find it difficult to credit it," he said. "An English-speaking girl! My dear old chap, you must invent a better story than that!"

"Come over here, guv'nor," said Nipper.

A thought had occurred to him. He led the way up the deck towards the half-wrecked deckhouse. Eagerly, he peered at the planks. Lee held the light lower, and a soft exclamation escaped him. There were some damp footprints visible.

"Look at those, sir!" said Nipper triumphantly.

They were small footprints, and even the toe-marks could be detected. By no stretch of the imagination could those footprints be mistaken for Nipper's. They were small and dainty.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Fenton, scratching his head.

"I rather think we owe you an apology, old boy," said Lee, patting Nipper on the back. "Really, this is the most extraordinary development! Tell me again what happened—in detail."

After Nipper had finished there were many excited comments.

"English-speaking," murmured Lee, as he knelt on the deck, closely examining the footprints. "This girl, however, has never known the civilisation that we ourselves are familiar with. She is essentially a creature of the wilds."

"How can you tell that, sir?" asked Stevens, in wonder.

"My dear chap, look at these footprints," replied Lee. "Although small, there is every sign that the toes have never been constricted by shoes. Nipper tells us that this girl was at least fifteen years old, yet she has been barefooted all her life."

"Who can she be?" asked Mr. Adams. "I mean, alone on this weed——"

"Not alone," broke in Lee. "There must be others."

"But how on earth——"

"If that girl was alone, she would certainly not know the English language," said the detective keenly. "She must have been brought up well, for Nipper assures us that her English was refined. We learn two things from this adventure. Firstly, we are not alone in this waste of weed. Secondly, the weed itself is not treacherous, as we had believed. If this girl can traverse long stretches of it, so can we."

"What can we do?" asked Nipper tensely. "Oughtn't we to light flares, or something? Perhaps these people will spot us——"

"We had better do nothing until the morning," broke in Lee. "There is no need for flares. That girl must have informed her companions, whoever they are, long before this. Although she herself might have been friendly, there is no knowing what attitude her fellows will display towards us."

"It's a long while to dawn," objected Nipper.

"We'll get back to the saloon," insisted Lee. "Mr. Adams, one of us will remain on watch. We'll take it in turns. By the way, do you know if there are any firearms on this ship?"

"I believe there are a couple of old Service revolvers in the captain's cabin."

"And ammunition?"

"I fancy so," said Mr. Adams. "Two or three boxes, I believe."

"Then we'll take those revolvers, and prepare ourselves for any emergency," said Lee crisply. "Now, boys, don't make any further objections. You're going back to bed, and if you are sensible you will settle yourselves to sleep."

THE boys didn't like it much, and for some time after they had settled themselves down they could not sleep. But after a while slumber came to them. When they awoke full daylight had arrived. The sun was shining through the everlasting haze.

Mists were drifting round the brig, and it was impossible to see for more than two or three hundred yards in any direction. So far

as could be seen at present, no change had taken place during the night.

"If we hadn't seen that footprint on the deck, we shouldn't have believed that yarn of yours, Nipper," said Tommy Watson bluntly. "It's so—so fantastic. I can't believe it, even now."

"It does seem like a dream," admitted Nipper, as he stared into the haze. "I say, there is a change, you know. The weed's a lot thicker. Look how tightly it's packed round the ship now."

"But we're still moving, dear old boy," pointed out Tregellis-West. "I don't quite like the way this weed is packin' itself all round us. Frightfully disturbin', you know. Makes us feel imprisoned, what?"

"Yes," said Nipper slowly. "It's as the gov'nor told us. We're trapped in the heart of the Sargasso Sea, and once the weed grips a ship it never lets go. I'm afraid we're hopelessly entangled. But I'd give quids to know what lies beyond these mists," he added, staring into the unknown.

"Listen!" ejaculated Stevens suddenly.

Nelson Lee, who was talking with Mr. Adams, checked abruptly. He, too, had heard something unusual. A strange kind of chattering chorus, accompanied by shrill squeaking. Some of the sounds seemed to come from the weed, others from the air; and they were getting nearer.

"There they are!" yelled somebody.

On the fringe of the mist, two or three hundred yards away, a number of tiny, nimble figures appeared in view. They were leaping over the weed; monkeys by the score. Hovering over them, and making a great commotion, were flocks of birds.

"They're not sea birds," said Mr. Adams, staring.

"Parrots," commented Lee. "Brightly-coloured parrots, too—the Amazonian species. I fancy. Either they've bred from abandoned pets, or they might have drifted into the Sargasso in another way. Really, young 'uns, we're making a number of extraordinary discoveries in this wasteland—and we've only just arrived here."

"These parrots, with the monkeys, make things feel cheery and homelike," remarked Browne. "No longer can we truthfully describe this weed as a place of the dead. Upon the whole, brothers——"

"Shut up, Browne!" interrupted Stevens tensely. "Look over there! By Jove, the mists are clearing now. I can see—— Yes! Look! Isn't that another ship over there? That hazy thing sticking out of the weed!"

Stevens was not the only one who saw it. All eyes were intently focused upon the phantom-like shapes which were so mysteriously appearing out of the mist. As though by magic the early morning fog rolled away. It moved in swirling waves, rolling across the weed like enormous clouds of smoke.

And as the air cleared, so an extraordinary spectacle came within view. The Vulture, instead of being alone in this world of weed—as many of her crew had thought until now—

and many companions. Not a thousand feet away arose the rusted, rotten funnel of a fair-sized steamer. She was well down by the stern, her bows, streaked with red, jutting up awkwardly out of the weed. Even her bridge could be seen, with tattered remnants of canvas still visible. The rust was thick over every foot of her.

"Abandoned at sea, I reckon," muttered Mr. Adams. "Down by the stern, left sinking. Then she must have drifted on, and so found her last haven here."

Beyond the rusted steamer were other shapes, now emerging from the clearing mists. A smallish schooner, with her masts intact, and with torn remnants of sail festooned round them. A clumsy-looking oil-tanker, her funnel gone, and the majority of her superstructure battered and wrecked.

A strange-looking ship with an enormously high stern, listing heavily to starboard, could now be seen, too. She was different from the others, for the weed was festooned in tangled masses over her. It had grown across her deck, and long ropes and tendrils were reaching up in a horrible embrace. In fact, only her stern was visible.

"This is impossible!" muttered Mr. Adams, rubbing his eyes. "What do you make of that old tub, sir?" he added, pointing.

"She has the cut of a Spanish galleon," replied Nelson Lee. "She may not actually be one, but there's not the slightest doubt that she's three or four hundred years old. Sooner or later, Mr. Adams, derelicts of all kinds are drawn into this trap. And once here, they remain—until they rot."

CHAPTER 6.

People of the Weed!

THE landscape—or seascape, call it what you like—was fascinating to the watchers. Every minute there was something fresh to attract and hold their attention.

There could be no doubt that during the night they had been carried almost to the centre of the gigantic whirlpool which formed the Sargasso Sea. That irresistible force had pulled them in, and now they were imprisoned like any of these other hulks.

The adventurers were so fascinated that they had no thought for food. They could only stare at the remarkable sights which were unfolded before their eyes. The early mists had already cleared, but the eternal haze remained. The sun was hot, although it could not be actually seen; overhead there was just a dazzling glow. The air was humid, moist. The place was like the interior of a hothouse, and the absence of any wind made the heat seem all the greater.

"What do you make of those hulks over there, gov'nor?" asked Nipper, pointing. "They don't look quite the same as the others, but they're farther off, and we can't see them distinctly. There's a great group."

"Yes, I see what you mean," said Lee. "It is certainly a big cluster. There must be thirty or forty ships in that one spot, jammed and packed closely together. Some side by side, others stern to stern. A confused mass of derelict shipping. Almost an island in itself."

"I dare say we're gradually drifting nearer," remarked Mr. Adams.

"It's possible," said Lee. "But the weed has now become so congested that our progress is necessarily much slower. I don't think we shall see any appreciable change after this."

"What do you think of those congested hulks?" asked Mr. Adams.

"I'll tell you after I've examined them through the glasses," replied Lee. "I expect they have collected in that way quite naturally, but, at the same time, they have the appearance of some definite order. I fancy that the hand of man has assisted that of nature."

He put the powerful glasses to his eyes and was silent for some time.

"I can't help looking at that Spanish galleon," murmured Tommy Watson, his voice full of awe. "My only hat! Think of it! It might be one of the old treasure ships dating back to the times of the Armada!"

"The Spanish Main—what!" said Sir Montie dryly.

"And why not?" retorted Watson. "That galleon may be choked full of treasure—just lying here to rot!"

"Doubloons and pieces of eight begin to loom in the picture," said Browne dreamily. "Brothers, my romantic nature is responding to this atmosphere. Who knows but what we shall soon be engaged upon a stirring adventure which will rival any of those of Drake's?"

"Try not to be an ass, old man," said Stevens gently. "I know it's hard, but do your best."

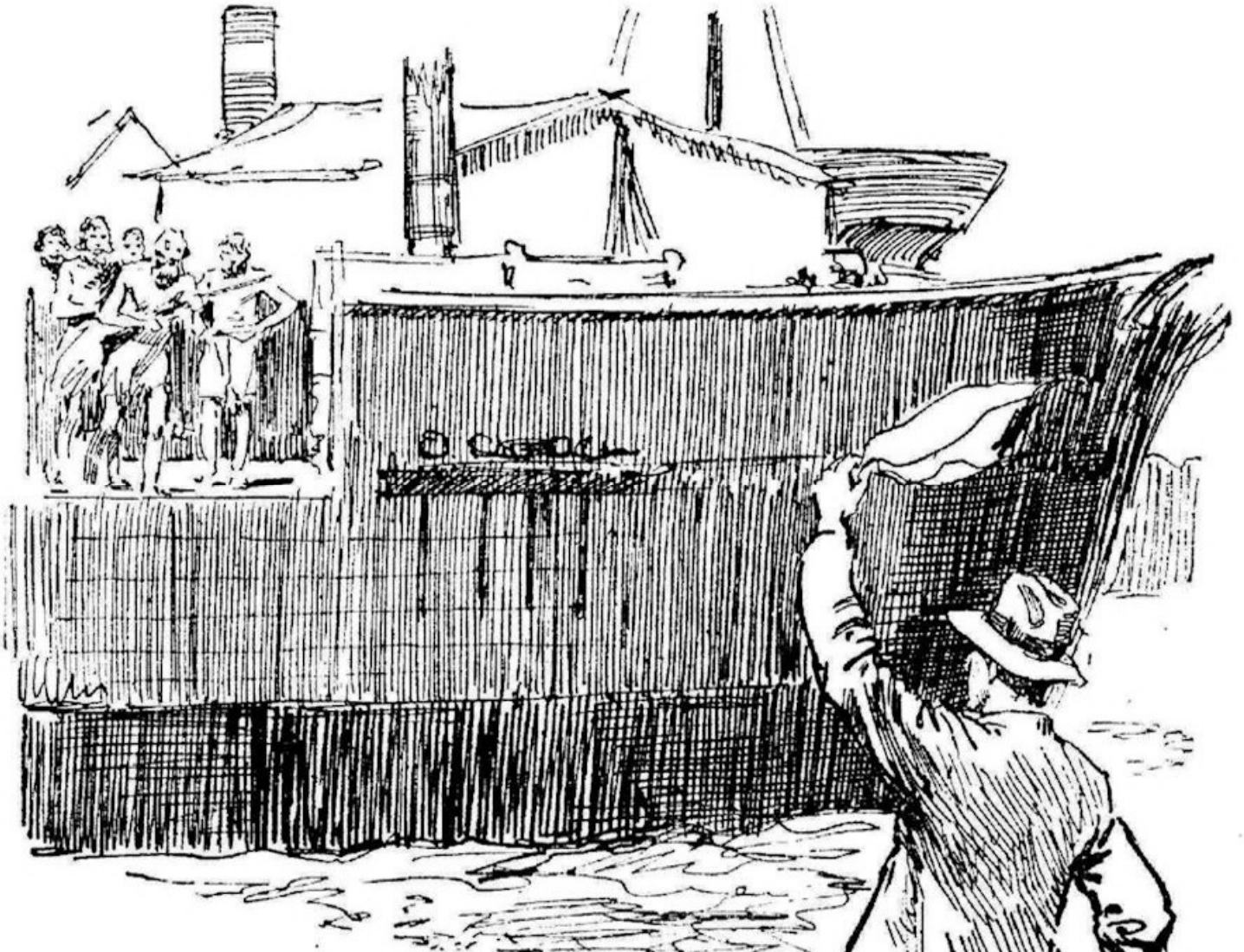
Nelson Lee passed the glasses to Mr. Adams.

"Get ready for a surprise, old man," he said gently. "That big collection of ships is an island—an island of ships. There are wooden stagings running from ship to ship, connecting them up. In many places there are elaborately-built awnings and covers. Roofs, in fact."

"Roofs?" repeated Mr. Adams, putting the glasses to his eyes. "What on earth for? There's no rain in this region—"

"So we have always believed, but we must be wrong," put in Nelson Lee. "This weather may be only periodic. And remember Nipper's description of that girl. If the climate here was always as humid as now, she would not possess a fair skin. We are learning things about the Sargasso, Mr. Adams."

The second officer found that Nelson Lee's statement was correct. That big collection of hulks and derelicts had been converted into an island, an island entirely surrounded by dense masses of weed, which was so thick



Nelson Lee advanced, waving a handkerchief. Several figures appeared on the old hulk—white men with coarse, ragged beards.

and so closely clustered about the wrecked vessels that nothing at all could be seen of the sea beneath.

Breakfast was disposed of. It was a hurried and scrappy meal. Nobody was particularly keen about it. The boys wanted to be on deck all the time, and even the men were just as eager. There were six members of the *Vulture's* crew with the party, in addition to Mr. Adams—Olsen, the Swedish sailor, Chips, the Cockney cook, and four more. Two of these were Danes, and they could scarcely speak a word of English. The others were of a nondescript type, and their language was decorated with much American slang. They were not the type of men who could be trusted in an emergency. So, all told, there were fourteen of the castaways.

Great excitement waxed among the boys when it was seen that Nelson Lee was making preparations for action. By mid-morning the sun was beginning to take definite shape. It could be seen in the sky as a vivid hazy orb. The dense mists which choked the upper air were thinning.

"What are you going to do, gov'nor?" asked Nipper keenly.

"Well, I think it is necessary that we should know as much about this island as

possible, and as quickly as we can," replied Nelson Lee. "I'm off to make a closer inspection."

"We'll go with you, gov'nor."

"I don't suppose it's any earthly use suggesting that you should remain on board," replied Lee dryly. "So it'll save a lot of trouble if I agree. Mr. Adams will remain here with the men."

The boys were as keen as mustard, and when, soon afterwards, they gingerly lowered themselves overside, they were well prepared. They had armed themselves with heavy sticks, in case any marine enemy should attack them.

Nelson Lee led the way. The weed here was even stronger than when Nipper had tested it. It stretched underfoot like a great carpet, spongy, resilient, but nevertheless strong. There seemed to be no weak spots, no treacherous patches which might engulf them.

But progress was slow. Lee tested every foot before he ventured upon it, and in that humid heat rapid progress was not desirable, in any case. Occasionally a squirmy thing would slither out of the weed and skitter away, slithering off somewhere into a black retreat. There seemed to be an abundance of water insects, but clearly they were not dangerous, or that girl with the bare feet could never have braved the weed.

"I SAY, this is too rummy for words!" muttered Stevens incredulously. They had covered more than half the distance, and were pausing for a rest. Just here there was a huge hummock of weed, rising like a hill; upon close investigation it proved to be dead and nearly dried. The adventurers were resting upon it. Just ahead of them lay the queerest island imaginable.

At closer quarters they could now see that it was much bigger than they had at first believed. There was an incredible number of wrecks in that bunch, wrecks of every description. Rusty old tramp-steamers, sailing vessels of every type and age, and even a gaunt, ragged relic which was recognisable as the remains of a destroyer.

From ship to ship there were improvised gangways with protective railings. They ran in all directions, in great profusion—some large like streets, others small, and serving as mere footpaths. In some places the decks were covered over with great roof-like structures, built up of scraps of wood, lengths of rusty iron, and stretches of tightened canvas. "There must be people there, gov'nor," said Nipper, frowning.

"That, I think, is a certainty," agreed Lee.

"Then why don't they signal, or something?" asked Nipper. "They must have spotted us by now. Yet we haven't seen a sign of life—at least, human life. There's something rummy about all this. I don't quite like it."

Neither did Nelson Lee, but he made no comment. Countless numbers of parrots and monkeys could be seen swarming on the roofs and up and down the various masts. Of humanity, however, there was not the slightest indication.

"I don't want to sound like an alarmist, but we'd better look out for squalls," said Lee, as they prepared to continue their journey. "So be on your guard, young 'uns, and obey orders on the instant."

"O.K., Chief!" chorused the cub detectives.

They pressed on, Lee watching the island closely. He had a feeling that hidden eyes were looking at their every movement. The boys, too, experienced this same sensation.

They were mystified. If there were people on this Sargasso isle, why should they be so shy and suspicious? Surely it was more likely that they would welcome newcomers from the outer world with open arms?

Crack!

The sound was sharp and unexpected. Nelson Lee halted abruptly, his jaw tightening. Immediately in front there was a jutting portion of the island, formed by an old-type sailing ship with her deck completely roofed over. A puff of smoke hovered listlessly in the air near her rail.

"They're firing at us!" ejaculated Fenton, in amazement.

"Better get down flat, boys," advised Lee grimly.

They obeyed without question. Lee himself, gripping his revolver, advanced.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted. "If you can understand English, as I believe you can, there's no need for this shooting match. We're friends, and we thought it only polite to pay a morning call."

Crack! Crack!

Two reports came from different quarters, but Lee heard no whistle of bullets. No doubt the weapons had been fired into the air. The detective took a chance, and continued his advance, this time holding his handkerchief aloft.

Then suddenly a kind of wood barricading was pulled back from the ship's deck. Several figures were now to be seen. Two or three of them carried rifles. Lee examined them with intense interest. They were white men, sure enough. They were bearded, and wore coarse, ragged clothing which appeared to consist of roughly-fashioned shorts—and precious little else.

"Go back to your ship!" came a stern voice.

Lee advanced still farther.

"We are respecting your white emblem, but if you advance nearer we shall shoot you down," continued the man who had spoken. "You are not wanted here."

"Perhaps you do not understand," interrupted Lee, noticing that the man who spoke was the central figure—a tall, imposing man, with a bigger beard than the others. "We are castaways in this wilderness, the same as yourselves. Is it not natural that we should desire to join forces with you?"

"We want no others on this spot," said the man of the weed. "Go! Go in peace while you are still safe. Our food supplies are short. We have women and children to care for. We can admit no more strangers. Go, I say!"

"Go!" echoed a number of other voices.

"Are you not unwise?" retorted Nelson Lee impatiently. "Some of the stores of our ship may be of use to you, and we are willing to share them. In such a situation as this we should all be friendly."

"There can be no friendliness between us," declared the man with the big beard. "Once again, I command you to go, and remember that if you or any of your com-

panions venture within a hundred yards of this spot, you will be shot on sight!"

Nelson Lee was about to make some further comment when he checked. A look of absolute astonishment came into his face, and he even blinked. Was his eyesight playing him tricks?

Like a flash, he whipped his glasses to his eyes, and stared. A figure was moving in the background—behind those bearded men. For one clear second Lee saw it. He lowered the glasses, and on his face there was an expression of complete understanding.

He knew now the reason for this hostility. The mystery was explained. For that figure he had so briefly glimpsed belonged to none other than Captain Blackford Angel!

CHAPTER 7.

The Appeal!

WITHOUT a word, Lee turned and plunged off over the weed. The boys watched him in surprise. He rejoined them, and said nothing except to give them a sharp order to follow.

It was unlike the great detective to give in so tamely. Nipper was positively bubbling with indignation. But Nelson Lee took no notice of his protestations and offered no explanation until they had retired behind the shelter of the great hummock of weed.

"Now, gov'nor!" insisted Nipper. "What's the big idea? Why didn't you tell those people that we're friendly?"

"I rather fancy that I did do so," said Lee dryly.

"Yes, but why didn't you insist——"

"Because their minds have already been poisoned against us," interrupted Lee, his manner changing.

"Poisoned against us?" repeated Fenton, puzzled. "We've never seen them before—and they've never seen us."

"No; but Captain Angel is a particularly unpleasant sort of ruffian," said Lee. "His mate, Mr. Cragg, is, if possible, a shade worse. Schwartz, the bo'sun, is a man of similar breed, and——"

"But they're not here, sir!" broke in Nipper, staring.

"They're here—with our friends of the face fungus," said Lee. "And, having got here first, they have apparently told a nice little string of lies about us. I can quite understand that Captain Angel doesn't fancy meeting Adams and myself again."

"You must be dreaming, gov'nor!" protested Nipper. "Captain Angel and his rotten crew abandoned the *Vulture* days ago. They went off in the longboat——"

"And they apparently got dragged into the Sargasso Sea by the same current which took the brig in its grip," said Lee grimly. "Now do you understand? I distinctly saw Angel a short time ago—although he did his utmost to dodge. Without question, he and his scoundrelly lot of ruffians have joined

forces with the Weed People. Their boat was smaller, and I dare say they were nearer to the weed than we were. That is why they arrived before us."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Fenton. "I thought we'd seen the last of those brutes."

"They say that bad pennies always turn up again," commented Lee. "There's really nothing astonishing in finding Angel and his men here—although I will admit that I was startled when I first caught sight of the ruffians."

"Why should they poison these people's minds against us, sir?"

"Because we should inevitably tell the truth—and, what is more, we should be believed," replied Lee. "Angel abandoned us on the *Vulture*, leaving us without a drop of water. A foul, dastardly crime. How will these people treat him if they learn of this? When Angel saw the brig, he very naturally got the wind up. I dare say he has told these people that we are cut-throats—mutineers—anything you like. At least, it's certain that he has antagonised them against us."

"And if we attempt to force ourselves upon them, it would only tend to justify their fears," nodded Fenton. "I can quite understand, sir. You think we ought to get in touch with them by strategy?"

"It is the only way," replied Lee. "Any other step would be dangerous—indeed, it might lead to our destruction. Undoubtedly, these people must be warned against Captain Angel; they must be put on their guard. As a first step we will return to the brig and see if we cannot plan out some line of action."

They prepared to move on. Then Nelson Lee suddenly came to an abrupt halt. Somebody had come into sight round another of those weed hummocks, some little distance away. Lightly, swiftly, the figure sprang over the spongy surface, moving with the grace of a true creature of the wilds.

"Look!" gasped Nipper. "It's the girl I told you of!"

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie. "And I'm not even wearin' a collar! I say, what a frightfully embarrassin' situation!"

The others only stared. They could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes. Certainly, they had accepted Nipper's yarn with "a grain of salt." Now they knew that he had been speaking the truth.

This girl was every bit as dainty and as graceful as he had said. Her costume consisted of cut strips of weed—dried until they looked like rushes. She halted suddenly, as though overcome with shyness. There was a frightened look in her eyes, mingled with an intense anxiety.

"Comre!" said Lee kindly. "You have nothing to fear."

The words reassured her, and she drew near.

"You are—English?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, rather!" chorused the boys.

"I'm English, too," she said simply. "Oh, I know that you are different from those terrible men who came to us yesterday. They say that you are murderers and thieves—"

"We thought as much," put in Nipper quickly. "But they're the murderers. They deserted us—left us to die of thirst. And now they're afraid that we shall come to your people and tell them the truth."

The girl's shyness was rapidly disappearing. She looked from one to the other of the castaways, her eyes growing rounder and rounder with wonder.

"You are the first people I have ever seen from—from the outer world," she said, almost with awe. "Except those awful men who came yesterday. When I saw them I felt glad that we were so cut off, but now I know how wrong I was."

"Who are you, young lady?" asked Nelson Lee.

"My name is Mary Weston," she replied promptly. "I've been here for over twelve years—ever since I was a baby of three."

"And you parents?"

"They are here, too—my father is Captain Weston, of the clipper *Araminta*," said the girl with pride. "But he doesn't call himself the captain now. He's the king of us all—the big man who was speaking to you just now."

"The king?" repeated Lee curiously.

"We have a little kingdom of our own," said this remarkable child of the weed. "My father has reigned for five years now. We have a little church, and a minister, and a doctor, and—and everything. They tell me that it's just the same as at home, only smaller."

"How many of you are there?" asked Lee, more and more intrigued.

"Forty-five," answered Mary Weston. "All the children go to school, you know," she added. "We've got quite a nice school, and my father insists that everybody shall be properly educated. He always says that one day we may get free—and he wants us to be civilised and educated like all the people at home."

"I shall be very interested to meet your father," said Lee earnestly. "He must be a very remarkable man. It is unfortunate that these scoundrels should have told such falsehoods about us. We are your friends, and—"

"I know—I know!" she cried. "I could tell it as soon as I saw you. Besides, this boy saved my life last night," she added, looking at Nipper. "I couldn't help coming over—to peep at you."

"You shouldn't venture out in the darkness, young lady," said Lee sternly.

"Oh, I'm always doing it," she replied. "My father is always telling me that I'm reckless and foolish, but I love doing it!"

"I say, couldn't you go back and tell your people that they're all wrong about us?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"It wouldn't be any good," she replied. "They never take any notice of me—they always say I'm a wild creature. Perhaps I

am," she added wistfully. "Somehow, I can't settle down as the others do."

"You had better get back before you get into trouble on our account," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "You may be sure that we will do all we can, young lady. In a very short time we will prove to your father that we are his friends."

"Please come quickly—very quickly," she urged, her voice becoming serious. "Already those men are causing trouble. The man who calls himself Captain Angel is jealous of my father. I'm sure he means harm."

Without another word she turned and sped away.

ALL the boys were excited when they got back to the *Vulture*. Mr. Adams thought they were "yarning" when they told him of what they had seen.

"It's a pity the girl didn't come back with us," said Stevens, shaking his head. "We wanted to ask her about the climate here—whether it was always the same as this. We wanted to know if there's any real danger from those giant lobsters—and how the monkeys and parrots got here—and whether they have any storms. I can think of hundreds of things."

"Patience, brother—patience," advised Browne. "Let us leave this matter in the capable hands of Brother Lee. He will establish communications with his majesty sooner or later."

"But how?" asked Stevens. "It's a deucedly difficult position. If we creep upon them at night they'll only think we're attacking—and then it'll look as if Captain Angel has told the truth about us."

"The Chief will think of a way," said Fenton confidently.

Later, Lee told them what he intended doing.

"As far as I can see, there is only one method that will bring success," he said, as they were sitting in the saloon at a meal. "There is nothing to be gained by making any elaborate plans—and any combined advance upon this colony would be misconstrued. I shall therefore go alone. To-night—after dark."

"But you might get killed, gov'nor!" protested Nipper.

"I'll take my chance of that," said Lee. "I rather fancy that I can get on the island successfully. I shall be captured, of course—but that is what I want. After I am captured I do not think there will be much difficulty in convincing Captain Weston of the true position."

"Let me go with you," advised Mr. Adams. "And why not at once?"

"This is a task that can be done by one just as well as by two," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Perhaps better. As for going at once, that would hardly be wise—for these people are on the watch, and although it is almost certain that they would allow me to

(Concluded on page 44.)



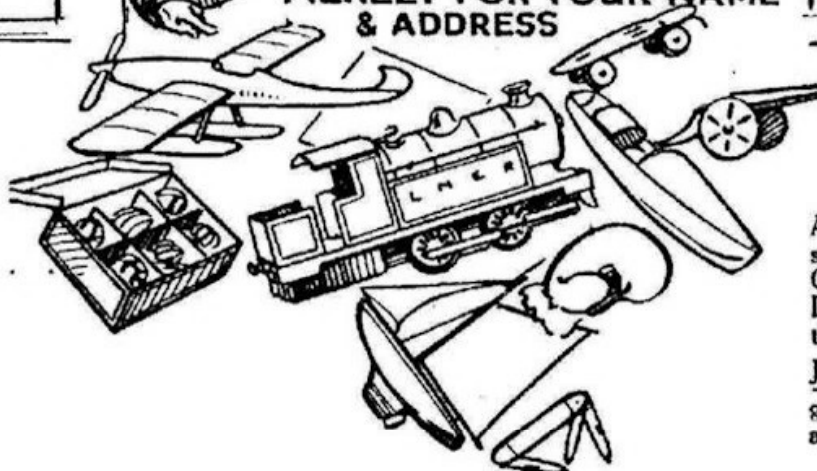
We continue our great Free Gift Scheme this week.

IF YOUR NAME

appears in the **LIST BELOW** you are entitled to a

FREE GIFT

and you should claim it at once.



To NELSON LEE READERS

All "Claim Coupons" must be sent to NELSON LEE, "Gift" Claim, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. so as to reach that address before Thursday, July 17th, after which date the gifts claimed will be despatched and no further claims can be recognised.

THIS WEEK'S GIFT LIST.

(Every reader whose name appears in this list is entitled to a Free Gift. See Special Claim coupon below.)

- D. Ainsworth, 19, Glebelands Rd., Prestwich, MANC'STER.
- G. Arnold, 22, Victoria Road, DEAL.
- W. A. Banks, 73, Chittys Lane, CHADWELL HEATH, Essex.
- A. Biggs, 62, Standard Road, ENFIELD WASH.
- D. R. Bisset, 30, Roseburn Street, EDINBURGH.
- E. Brown, 187, Warner Road, WALTHAMSTOW, E.17.
- A. E. Carr, 163, Glasgow Road, DUMBARTON.
- Miss M. Carrol, 26, Raglan Street, Beckett Street, LEEDS.
- A. C. Coker, Wolsey Grange, Cottage, ESHER, Surrey.
- J. Crotty, 44, Gt. William O'Brien Street, CORK.
- A. Denman, The Village, TIMPERLEY.
- R. W. A. Dunn, 181, Gilmour St., OTTAWA, Ont., Canada.
- C. Edwards, 59, Orme Road, WORTHING.
- J. Ewing, Queen Street, Sherbrooke, QUEBEC.
- Miss M. Fraser, 62, Sussex Street, PIMLICO, S.W.I.
- K. Fuller, 39, Thorpe Road, NORWICH.
- L. Golding, 53, Spring Vale, DARTFORD, Kent.
- H. Hamer, 10, Curzon Road, BOLTON.
- B. Hamilton, 78, Botanic Road, DUBLIN.
- R. Hart, 9, McGhee Street, CLYDEBANK.
- N. W. Hughes, 176, Sandwell Street, WALSALL.
- F. Ireland, Conyngham Cottages, Minster, nr. RAMSGATE.
- J. H. Karran, Boys School, Starnthwaite, near KENDAL.
- R. J. King, 89, Circular Road, LARNE, Co. Antrim.
- W. H. Lincoln, 15, Palgrave Road, GT. YARMOUTH.

- J. Lord, 25, Zion Terrace, BURNLEY.
- H. Marlow, 93, Dewsbury Road, DOLLIS HILL, N.W.
- J. F. Mills, 38, Hazelwood Avenue, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.
- K. Moore, Sinah Farm, SOUTH HAYLING, Hants.
- B. Oberman, 89, Montpelier Road, BRIGHTON.
- A. Plant, 12, High Street, EASTBOURNE.
- D. Pollard, 23, South Woodbine Street, DEWSBURY.
- J. Purse, 149, Cliftonville Road, BELFAST.
- F. E. Quenby, 23, Kenilworth Terrace, NOTTINGHAM.
- N. H. Radmore, 57, Summerland Street, EXETER.
- W. Rawling, Blackhow Farm, CLEATOR, Cumberland.
- F. Read, 12, Cross Street, YSTRAD, Rhondda.
- K. Senior, 26, Cedar Mount, Armley, LEEDS.
- H. Shanley, 67, Folly Avenue, ST. ALBANS, Herts.
- G. Taylor, 165, Prince Street, Pleck, WALSALL.
- L. Tomkins, Ashley, Worting Road, BASINGSTOKE, Hants.
- W. Trusselle, 105, Dartmouth Street, WOLVERHAMPTON.
- R. Tubbs, 259, High Street, Ashby, SCUNTHORPE.
- L. Verity, 17, Selby Road, Orrell Park, LIVERPOOL.
- H. W. Watts, 67, Beach Road, CAISTER-ON-SEA.
- I. Wells, 141, Kenry Street, TONYPANDY, Rhondda.
- J. Wintie, 7, Raglan Avenue, Raglan Street, HULL.
- H. Wolstenholme, 33, Fletcher Street, MANCHESTER.
- S. Woosey, 20, Fore Street, ST. IVES, Cornwall.
- K. Yeadon, 64, Highfield Road, BARROW-IN-FURNESS.

CLAIM COUPON—"NELSON LEE" FREE GIFT SCHEME. NO. 11

My name appears in this week's "Nelson Lee" Gift List, and I hereby claim the Free Gift allotted to me.

NAME AGE.....

ADDRESS

Ask two chums, to whom you have shown your name in this list, to sign in the spaces provided below.

NAME

ADDRESS

AGE.....

NAME

ADDRESS

AGE.....

OVERSEAS READERS

Any overseas reader whose name appears in this list, or reader who has since gone abroad, should note that the closing date for Overseas Claims is September 30th.

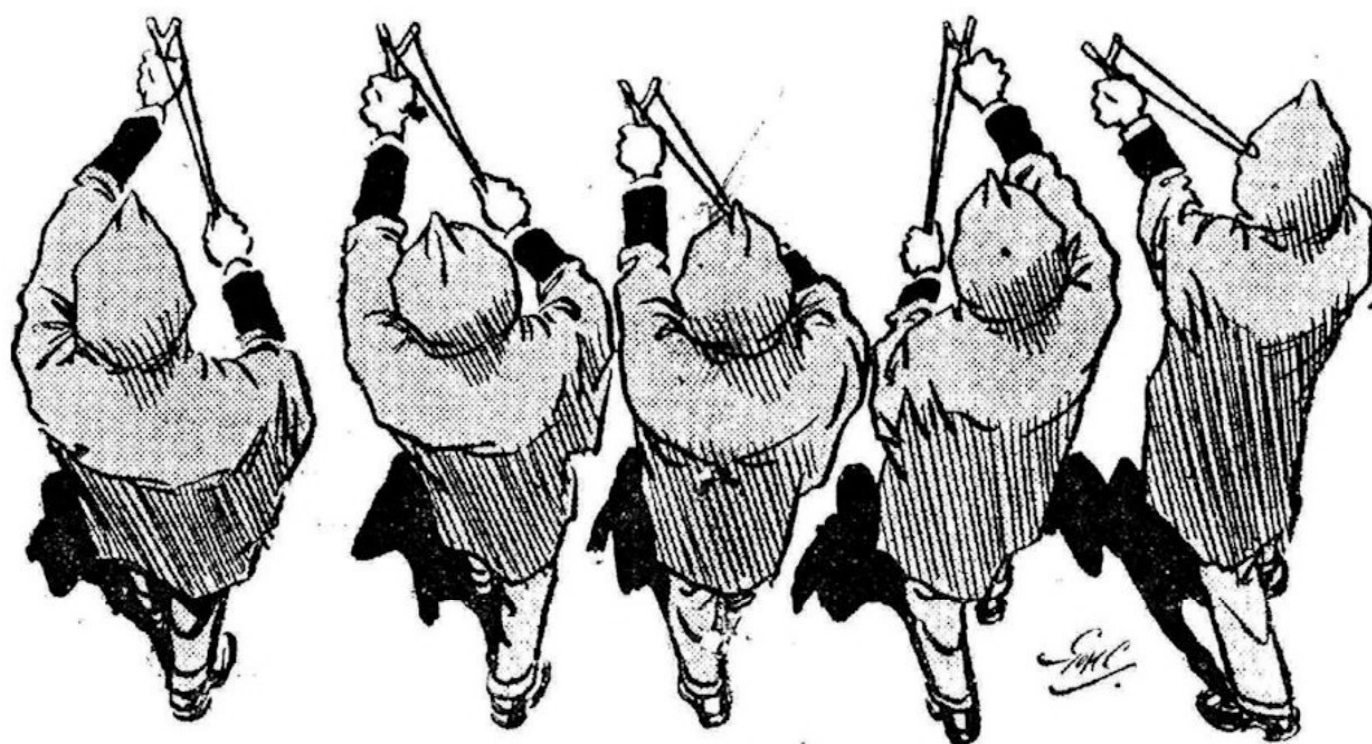
Earl Ern and Co. In Another Riotously Funny Episode!



THE THREE "K" BRETHREN!

versus

THE HOODED HORRORS!



The Rival Gang!

"WE are the 'Ooded 'Orrors," bayed Dicky Dyke, in his deepest voice, "an' the object of this 'ere gang is to wipe Ern Drawback off the face of the earth!"

A low murmur of approval came from the five other hooded figures, seated on boxes and buckets at the top of Mr. Dyke's cabbage patch, hidden from curious eyes by a row of beans.

Each wore a sack over face and shoulders down to the waist, with holes for the arms and slits for the eyes.

Dicky Dyke was called "Cap'n," and the symbol of the gang was a bean—for they intended to give the Three "K" Brethren "beans," and plenty of them.

Spies had informed the cap'n that the Three "K" Brethren were assembled in full strength in the cellar of Mrs. Drawback's residence, and the time and opportunity seemed about right to give them "beans."

Night was approaching, and so was Mr. Dyke, strolling in his garden, examining the progress of the innocent marrow and gazing upon his 'tatoes with the proud eyes of a man who sees the result of hard work.

Mr. Dyke was a very peaceable man, fond of the films, which he understood portrayed a world that was beyond his own. Coming upon the six hooded figures screened by his promising beans, his eyes bulged and his heart missed three beats out of four.

On tiptoe, he retired and said naught to his wife. Mr. Dyke was not of the stuff that heroes are made, and he had no desire to encounter the Hooded Horrors in his garden.

So, seizing his bowler hat, he departed to pay a visit to Mr. Drawback's coal-cellar, in which place of retirement Mr. Drawback was holding a spiritualists' meeting—some call it a "see-aunts," no mention being made of uncles.

The Hooded Horrors swore deep oaths, imparting to the dusky air that none would sleep in peace, or eat with relish, or walk with pride, until in the very dust were humbled Ern Drawback and his followers.

Having sworn, each solemnly chewed a bean, the sacred symbol of the gang, but Hooded Horror No. 6 struck a maggot with his fang, and was violently bean-sick.

They were armed with catapults and a supply of very small but firm potatoes, "seeds" Mr. Dyke called them, the joy and pride of his life.

"My merry men," spake Dicky Dyke, cap'n of the H.H., "my aim is straight and goodly, and by my gadzook I'll slay Ern Drawback, who calls himself the Earl of Backstreet, afore the sun shall rise!"

Placing a round and hard 'tato in the sling, he aimed at a chimney-pot, the property of a neighbouring Mrs. Smith's landlord, and fired. Maybe the hood obscured his eye-sight, maybe the cap'n wasn't in form. Nevertheless, Mrs. Dyke, about to communicate with Mrs. Smith over the fence, received a wallop on the back of her head.

Earl Ern and Co. In

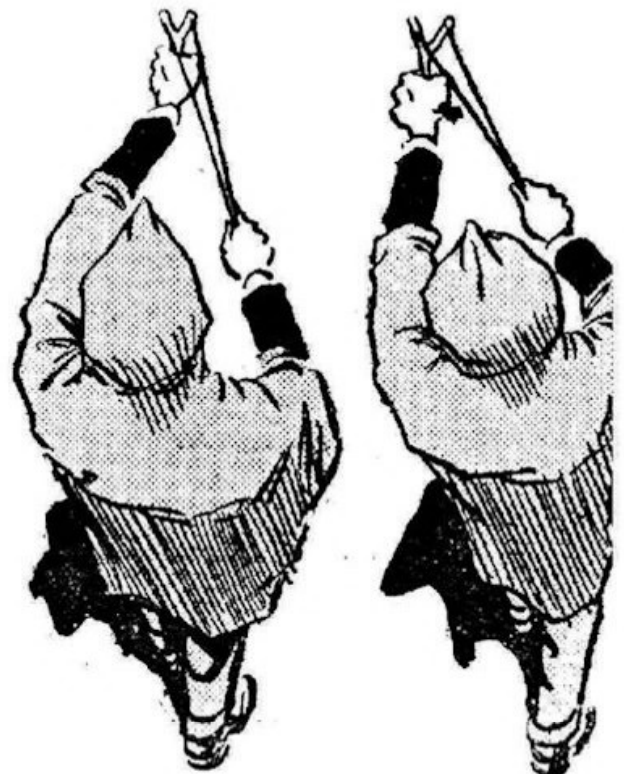


THE THREE

A ringing shriek filled the darkening heavens. Mrs. Smith saw her dear friend clasp the back of her head and reel. The street turned out in full numbers in answer to Mrs. Dyke's cries, believing murder was being done. Mrs. Dyke, perceiving Mrs. Smith as the nearest person, suspected her, and, seizing the small washing tub, nearly enveloped Mrs. Smith's head and shoulders in it.

The cap'n and the five other Hooded Horrors heard and saw things happening which were not good for the young, and the

THE HO



ously Funny Episode!



BRETHREN!

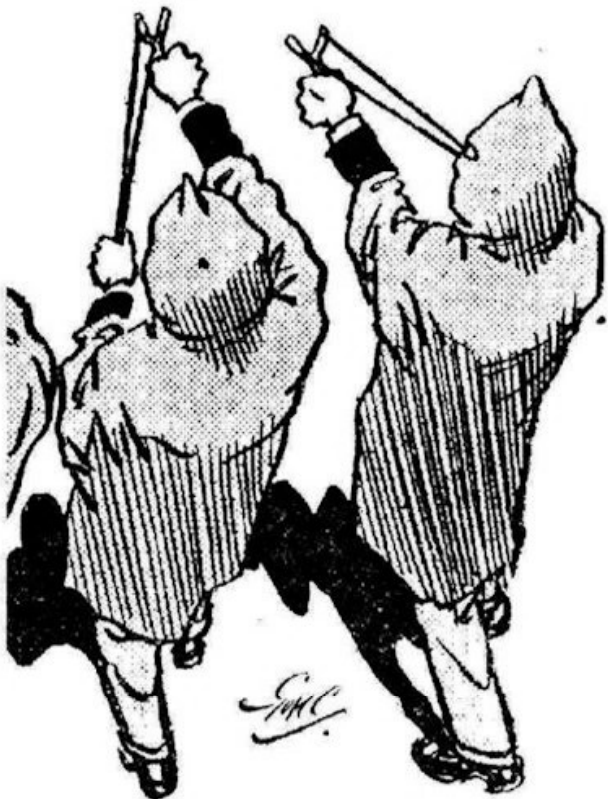
arrival of a dozen alarmed neighbours warned them it was time they were off.

"Funny," mused the catapultist, "I missed the chimney-pot! Let's get!"

They got, heading vengeance-bound for Mrs. Drawback's coal-cellar. However, hardly had they vanished over the back fence, into an alleyway, before three heads appeared from behind Mr. Dyke's marrow bed.

"Ha, ha!" chortled Ern, Earl of Backstreet, resplendent in his father's nightshirt and the dustbin lid as a shield. "Thou hast

RRORS!



served us right loyally, my Lord of Alleyway."

Lord Lou, fat and ever hungry, was just finishing a baby marrow.

"Told yer, didn't I?" he declared proudly. "Gassy told me abart it. 'E's a 'ooded 'Error."

By this time Mrs. Dyke had lost her bonnet, which Mrs. Smith was waving to her neighbours as a trophy of war.

"To norse! To norse!" breathed the bold earl. "This night, by my faith, I shall cleave the head of Dicky Dyke from 'is shoulders!"

By which statement one might gather that the brave earl intended to knock off the head of his rival. The knights tiptoed from the garden and scaled the fence. The earl and the lord, followed by Sam, Squire of Gashouse Property, dropped into the alleyway, but Lou, Lord of Alleyway, caught his pants upon a nail.

There came the rending of garments, and my lord left a good six inches of "seat" upon the nail. Being of a resourceful nature, though weighing fifteen stone, he clasped his mother's copper lid to his rear portion and followed the avenging knight and his squire.

Mr. Drawback's Meeting!

MR. DRAWBACK was in the throes of great excitement. He had tried to be most things in life, and now he had come to the conclusion that he was a "medium" who could make chairs and tables move without visible means, and call long-lost and eagerly-forgotten aunts and uncles from realms immortal.

At the dusky hour of twilight he stood at the back gate of his residence to receive in great secret those attending his first séance in the coal-cellar, which, by rights of precedence, was the domain of Ern, Earl of Backstreet.

Mr. Drawback was a small man, timid and hen-pecked. Sign and counter-sign having been exchanged, each arrival was invited to descend the coal-chute without making too much noise, owing to the nearness of Mrs. Drawback, who should have gone to the pictures but hadn't.

Mr. Dyke arrived, and about a dozen other misters. They entered the coal-chute, clean of collar and garment, to arrive at the bottom looking like coal-heavers.

A few candles illumined the scene, and as soon as all were seated, Mr. Drawback asked them to join hands, and, when the lights were out, things would move, and perhaps strange voices might be heard.

Things were about to move all right, and more than one strange voice would soon be heard, shattering the silence of the coal-cellar.

The meeting had hardly started before six stealthy forms wriggled across Mrs. Drawback's backyard.

"They're there!" chortled Dicky Dyke. "Listen!"

He raised the coal-hole lid, and six hood heads hovered near. At that moment Mr.

Drawback broke the silence by saying things would soon move.

The cap'n of the Hooded Horrors placed ammunition in his catapult and fired. Mr. Zozzenuts received it clean in the ear. The 'tato was soft and made a horrible mess.

"Brother," he whispered—Mr. Dyke said they must call each other "brother," as the spirits preferred it—"that wasn't 'alf a wallop," he complained, clearing out his ear.

"Ush, brother," beseeched the medium, in a trembling voice. "I can 'ear the ether quivering."

The "quiver" was caused by the cap'n's second 'tato, and Mr. Dyke received it full on the nose. In the darkness they saw nothing, only heard.

Creeping upon the Hooded Horrors were the Three "K" Brethren.

Suddenly the cap'n, with his head and shoulders down the coal-chute, felt strong hands seize him and he was shot downwards. Before his five fellow Horrors could guess what had happened, they followed—head first.

"They're comin', strong and plenty!" cried Mr. Drawback, above the yells and confusion of the surprised Hooded Horrors.

"Now we'll abart smash 'em!" breathed Ern, Earl of Backstreet. "To norse! To norse!"

The valiant earl vanished down the coal-chute and was followed by his squire. But the noble lord was unfortunate. He descended as far as his stomach would permit and then became wedged, leaving his legs kicking in the air.

A free fight was going on below. Groans, cries and shrieks ascended to the darkened heavens. The bewildered but proud Mr. Drawback was amazed at the power he possessed as a medium. Mr. Dyke found himself beneath a struggling mound of humanity and reckoned the meeting might be called a success, but he didn't want any more spiritualism and no more boots in his eyes.

He fought himself free and struggled to where he thought the exit should be. His fists shot out; one caught the cap'n of the Hooded Horrors on the nose and the other knocked a lump out of the wall; then he managed to scramble up the chute into the clawing hands of the shrieking Lord of Alleyway, who was fighting, panic-stricken, to free himself.

Mr. Dyke gripped a handful of hair and clung to it like a drowning man, while Lou bellowed his loudest.

By this time the meeting was somewhat in a state of confusion, and in the total darkness friend smote friend and blood flowed freely.

The noble cap'n retreated to a quiet corner and fired his catapult without taking aim. His intention was to defeat the Three "K" Brethren, whose number, he was forced to conclude, had mysteriously increased. His spy, Gassy, had reported there were only three in the gang.

Mr. Drawback, by this time, had lost his jacket, collar and temper, and was in danger of losing his trousers, for, reaching the chute, he clung to Mr. Dyke's legs, and Mr. Dyke clung to my lord's hair, while Gassy, screaming in terror, clung to Mr. Drawback's trousers, which were slowly coming off.

Suddenly there came a report like a cork from a bottle, and Lou, Lord of Alleyway, felt himself speeding down the chute. He landed on top of Mr. Dyke, who was atop of Mr. Drawback, who landed on Gassy, who had Mr. Drawback's trousers in his hands.

"Knights, knights!" cried the triumphant Earl of Backstreet, bringing his dented dustbin lid down upon Mr. Zozzenut. "To death with the Hooded Horrors!"

Dicky Dyke's Triumph!

THE valiant earl was certainly amazed at the strength of the Hooded Horrors. The cellar seemed to be full of them. Mr. Drawback, having called the "spirits" and obtained his desire, discovered it was beyond his powers to dispel them. Groans and moans and threats and fists filled the air, but the "spirits" remained.

Suddenly the cap'n of the Hooded Horrors, running short of ammunition, discovered a candle and lit it. In the dim revealing light he saw humanity battling and fighting, many having lost garments, and even shoes and boots.

Mr. Drawback looked like a ghost in his white under-pants, and was laying it thick and furiously upon Mr. Zozzenuts, who retaliated with heartiness.

Understanding the situation at a glance, the brave cap'n collected trophies of war as quickly as he could. Among the spoils were a dustbin lid upon which was painted the arms of the Earl of Backstreet (a lion rampant on a blade of grass), a copper lid, three shoes, four waistcoats, five jackets, eight collars, a dozen buttons and the ripped nightshirt which served the fighting earl as a jacket, and upon which was painted the red cross of St. George.

Hastily tying the relics in a bundle, the cap'n made for the chute. He reached the top and escaped. But only in the nick of time.

For hardly had he vaulted the fence at the bottom of the garden, having first flung his bundle over, when Mrs. Drawback, by this time quite convinced that something was happening in her cellar, summoned the neighbours with a view to investigating.

A small but very curious band gathered outside the coal-chute, listening. It sounded very much as if murder was being committed below, and someone suggested a water-hose.

No sooner suggested than acted upon.

Lord Lou, breathless, had found the cellar stairs and the means to safety, feeling sore and wounded. He opened the door and a broad beam of light lit up the scene below.

Before the Hooded Horrors could intervene, strong hands seized their leader and pushed him down the chute. It was one up (or one down!) to the Three "K" Brethren.



Gassy, realising that Dicky Dyke had done a bunk, called the remaining four Hooded Horrors to follow, and he was halfway up the chute when a stream of water sent him tumbling back.

Horror of a wetting was nothing compared with the terrors in the semi-darkness below. Gassy persisted and scrambled into the ring of neighbours, who were holding lights and directing the water-hose into the cellar.

Mrs. Drawback, seeing something coal-black and hooded, bedraggled and furious, emerge from the cellar, promptly fainted. Everybody retired in scared confusion, and by the time the fire brigade had arrived the five Hooded Horrors had made their escape.

"Demons!" someone cried. "Yer 'ouse is haunted, Mrs. Drawback."

"Knights, knights!" shrieked Lord Lou, from the top of the cellars stairs.

The squire heard and fought free of his foes and scrambled up the stairs. The stream of light through the open door revealed a river of water hissing down the chute and a mound of fighting humanity, some almost stripped of their garments.

The Earl of Backstreet vanished up the stairs, and so the Three "K" Brethren escaped, leaving Mr. Drawback's spiritualists to be found on the spot by the fire brigade. The clanging of the fire-engine bell brought fresh crowds to the scene, including the rival gang, who had now disposed of their hoods.

Mr. Zozzenut was first to be hauled up the coal-chute. Mr. Drawback came next, minus his trousers and looking "done to the wide." Feebly he murmured something about "spirits." Then the other members of

the meeting were brought to light and were identified.

"I ain't agoin' to call no more spirits," confessed Mr. Drawback feebly. "It's heasy to call 'em, but to blooming well sen' 'em 'ome is another matter."

"We saw 'em escape," a dozen voices exclaimed. "Five of 'em, black, and with fire comin' from their mouths!"

"Horns on their 'eads!" confessed another.

The local newspaper hailed Mr. Drawback as a wonderful medium. For a week he was the most famous man in the town. But never again, he vowed, would he call spirits. No, thank you! And what he would like to know was what would they do with his trousers?

But the broody Earl of Backstreet realised quite well who had his father's missing pants. Likewise, he smarted under the loss of his shield, for no good knight can lift his head while an enemy has his shield.

Meeting the now proud and triumphant Dicky Dyke next morning, he hissed these words:

"Avaunt, vile miscreant, thy day hath come."

"Becher it ain't," chortled the cap'n of the Hooded Horrors. "Wot a whackin'! Lummy, I'd 'ide me head in shame if my father lost his trousers."

"Thy day hath come!" repeated the Earl of Backstreet warningly, and departed unto the home of his mother, there to scheme dark schemes of vengeance against the Hooded Horrors.

(Another hilarious Three "K" Brethren yarn next week, chums!)



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

HARD WORK!

Railway boss: "And what sort of a job do you want?"

Weary Wilfred: "Well, guv'nor, you know the chap what goes along a train and taps the wheels to see all's well?"

Railway boss: "Yes."

Weary Wilfred: "I thought I'd like to help him listen."

J. Lowry, 138, Wymering Mansions, Elgin Avenue, London, W.9, has been awarded a handsome watch.

RESTRICTIONS!

"Two rooms will cost you twenty-five shillings a week—but no cats, dogs, pianos, loud speakers, or children allowed," said the landlady.

"Do you mind if my shoes squeak a little?" inquired the rooms-seeker.

(E. Copestake, 48, Eltham Road, West Bridgford, Notts, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A CONFESSION!

Pat was relating an accident to a friend in which he fell thirty feet.

"Did all your sins flash through your mind as you fell?" asked the friend.

"I fell thirty feet—not thirty miles," retorted Pat.

(T. Thorpe, 4, Bolton Road, Wednesfield, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE CHEEK!

Old Gentleman (to little boy playing in puddle): "Get out of that puddle at once, you naughty boy!"

Boy (indignantly): "Go and find a puddle for yourself. I saw this one first!"

(W. Painter, 7, Sol Memorial Ward, Bart's Hospital, London, E.C.1, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

BRAINS!

The mistress asked the new maid to fill the cruet. Time passed, and the maid did not put in an appearance, whereat the mistress betook herself to the kitchen.

"You have been a long time filling the cruet, Jane," she said sternly.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," replied Jane, "but, you see, I have had a terribly hard job getting the pepper through the little holes in the top of the pot."

(E. Titterton, 337, Collyhurst Road, Collyhurst, Manchester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE TIME TO TELL!

Charlie: "You do look tired, mother."
Mother: "I'm so tired, dear, I cannot move a hand."

Charlie: "Then I want to tell you that I've eaten all the strawberry jam."

(A. Gorbutt, 7, Park View, Cleethorpes, Lincs, has been awarded a penknife.)

SWINDLED!

An Aberdonian took a sixpenny ticket in a raffle for a pony and trap, and was lucky enough to win it. All his friends thought he would be overjoyed at this good fortune, but when the pony and trap was taken to him, all he did was to look round surveying them with a gloomy face. At last, turning to one of his friends, he said:

"I told ye the whole thing was a swindle."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the other.

"Well," demanded the Aberdonian, "where's the whip?"

(R. Walker, 36, Portland Street, Aberdeen, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HERE'S A GOOD 'UN!



A HARD WORLD!

Conscientious father (after chastising his son): "And now, my boy, tell me why I have punished you."

Little son (indignantly): "That's it; first you thrash me and then you don't know what you've done it for!"

(George Kerr, 21, St. James' Road, Belfast, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

UNSYMPATHETIC!

Big-game hunter (in thrilling tones): "Once, while I was having a meal in the jungle, a lion came so close to me that I could feel its breath on the back of my neck. What did I do?"

Bored listener: "Turned up your collar!"

(Valerie Raven, 141, Croyland Road, Lower Edmon-ton, London, N.9, has been awarded a pen-knife.)

POOR PAT!

Pat had been working for a Scottish firm and had had the misfortune to fall off some scaffolding. He was relating his troubles to some friends.

"And on top of all that," he bewailed, "they stopped my pay from the time I started to fall off the scaffolding."

(C. Lloyd, 185, Holyhead Road, Wednesbury, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.)

SOLVING THE DIFFICULTY!

P.C. 72 and his mate had found an abandoned car in Parliamentary Road, P.C. 72, with really commendable promptness whipped out his notebook.

"Ow d'you spell Parliamentary?" he asked.

"Dunno," said his mate. "Let's move the car round to Peel Street."

(J. Kay, 21, Sussex Street, Rochdale, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

High Jinks At St. Frank's This Week, Chums!

The REMOVE'S "GOOD TURN"!



By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER 1.

Nothing Doing!

MR. JAMES CROWELL, Housemaster of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, fixed his eagle eye upon Alec Duncan, of the Remove, as the latter hesitatingly advanced into the study.

"Well?" barked Mr. Crowell sharply.

The New Zealand boy jumped. Breakfast was only just over, and Mr. Crowell's temper was evidently ragged. His voice had a note in it not entirely unlike the sound of a rip-saw.

"Good-morning, sir," said Duncan, with a gulp.

"G o o d - morning, Duncan!"

"I came to ask you, sir, about my grandmother—"

"Y o u r grand-

mother!" thundered Mr. Crowell, leaping to his feet and pointing to the door. "How dare you? Duncan, leave this room!"

"But—but what have I said, sir?" asked Duncan, in amazement.

"It is not what you have said, but what you are about to say—and I will save you the trouble of saying it," retorted the Housemaster. "I am very sorry about your grandmother. I dare say she's very ailing, and in spite of the fact that she lives in New Zealand you probably want to go to Leeds so that you can show your sympathy all the more."

Duncan's jaw sagged.

"She—she's not in New Zealand, sir," he faltered, all the wind taken out of his sails. "She's over here on a trip, and I believe that she's going north with a party to-morrow—"

Handforth & Co. convince their Form-master that he's losing his memory!

"Exactly—going north!" rapped out Mr. Crowell. "Doubtless to Leeds! Much as I regret it, Duncan, your grandmother will not have the pleasure of your delightful society. For you are not going to Leeds—nor is any other boy of this House."

"But I don't see——"

"You are making yourself appear more dense than I thought you were, young man," said Mr. Crowell tartly. "You know perfectly well that you came here with the primary object of deceiving me. You don't mind whether your grandmother goes to Leeds, or to Halifax—or to Timbuctoo! Your one aim is to get to the Test-match. And you are not going!"

Alec Duncan was silent; the charge was true.

"There'll be no nonsense over this third Test-match," went on the Housemaster, compressing his lips. "At both the earlier matches a number of boys of this House—yourself included, I believe—played sundry tricks in order to get away from the school. Some went, others didn't go. Naturally, there was jealousy. There will be no jealousy this time."

"But to-morrow's a half-holiday, anyhow, sir," urged Duncan, "and if we make up our lessons next week—I mean, if we take the whole day——"

"You won't take the whole day, Duncan," broke in Mr. Crowell acidly. "Nobody from this House will receive my permission to go. Leeds is too far away."

"But there's a special coach leaving——"

"I don't care anything about special coaches or excursion trains," broke in the Housemaster. "You can go, Duncan. Definitely and finally, none of my boys, senior or junior, will receive my sanction to attend this cricket match."

Duncan went, and out in the corridor he met Harry Gresham, who shared Study J with him. The look on Alec's face was enough.

"No luck, old son?" asked Gresham sympathetically.

"He's as hard as nails!" growled Duncan.

They moodily went along to the lobby, where Edward Oswald Handforth was leaning in the open doorway, gazing abstractedly across the Triangle at the scaffolding of the East House, which was still unfinished.

"It's no good, Handy," said Gresham. "Alec's failed—the same as all of us."

Handforth turned round.

"What else did you expect?" he asked bitterly. "When we've got a Housemaster with a heart of stone, what's the good of trying to coax him? He's as obstinate as a mule, too!"

He pointed dramatically.

"We can't go to the Test-match, but any of those workmen can go!" he went on, his wrath rising. "Pipes Parker, that plumber's mate chap, is going by the excursion, and he's taking his giddy Marshall Road XI, too! They can go but we can't!"

"Disgusting!" commented Vivian Travers mournfully.

"It's worse than disgusting, sweethearts," said Kirby Keeble Parkington, as he strolled up with Harvey Deeks and Clement Goffin, his chums of Study C. "It's plain, downright cruelty. Something ought to be done about it."

And Parkington looked at Handforth suggestively.

"What's the good of glaring at me?" demanded the burly Remove skipper. "I'm not a magician! I can't turn a mule into a human being, can I? In any case, you Carlton fatheads can jolly well clear off!"

"Pax, darling!" said Parkington soothingly. "Let us not have harsh words! In this common disappointment we must pull together. Let our rivalry be dropped until this crisis is over. I, for one, am not altogether without hope. Surely, with so many first-class brains in the Remove, we can think of something?"

Handforth ceased to glare.

"You're right," he admitted. "There's no sense in us scrapping now. But what's the good of hoping about the Test-match? Crowell's laid down the law—and, after all, he's our Housemaster."

"The worst of it is, the Head's away," said Gresham sadly.

"That makes no difference—the Head wouldn't interfere with Crowell's ruling, anyhow," remarked Travers. "I believe that Crowell is overworked. His temper's been getting a sharper edge on it for weeks, and now it's become pointed, with all sorts of jags like broken glass."

"I fancy you're right, old man," said Church. "Everybody's noticed it. And things have come to a head since yesterday, because heaps of us have been going to old Crowell asking for special leave—telling yarns about ailing aunts and expiring cousins and all that sort of thing. Crowell doesn't swallow anything, and he's made up his mind to keep every man-jack of us here."

"And after what happened at the last Test-match, sweetheart, who can blame him?" said Parkington. "Without malice, I would remind you Old-Timers that we Red-Hots were very painfully dished at Lord's. No, it wasn't your fault—it was Pycraft's idiotic mistake. But we were dished—you saw the match, and we didn't."

"And this time Mr. Crowell isn't having any," said Handforth bluntly. "That's the long and the short of it. He's taking no chances."

CHAPTER 2.

The Fatal Notice!

"SEEN it?" asked Reggie Pitt sadly.

"Seen what?" growled Handforth.

"What are you wailing about?"

"Go into the lobby, and have a look at the notice on the board," replied Reggie. "It's a corker! It's one of those



Mr. Crowell stood and blinked. The room seemed to be full of animals. "Come in, ass; don't stand there!" squawked the parrot from the bookcase.

notices you can't misunderstand. Old Crows'-feet meant to make it definite, and I think he's succeeded."

Handforth dashed into the Ancient House, and he found a whole crowd round the board, including the burly, broad-shouldered Carlton Gang. On a piece of exercise paper, in the Housemaster's own handwriting, was the following:

"IMPORTANT NOTICE.

"This is to state definitely and emphatically that the boys of this House can NOT go to the Leeds Test-match.

"JAMES CROWELL

"(Housemaster)."

"Well, there's nothing undecided about that!" grunted Handforth. "It sort of finishes the whole thing. It closes the argument with a crash."

"Does it?" said Trotwood dreamily.

He refused to explain, but wandered off in a thoughtful mood. The rest of the fellows discussed the topic, waxing indignant, or groaning mournfully, according to their immediate feelings. But one thing seemed positively certain. Nobody would be enjoying the delights of the third great Test-match between England and Australia on the morrow.

Handforth & Co. were mooching about in the Triangle when Nick Trotwood approached them. There was a keen light in his eye.

"Come indoors, you chaps," he said. "The crowd's cleared away from the notice-board now, and I want to point something out to you. Funny how you've all missed seeing it. And it might be important, too."

"What are you getting at?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

He and the others accompanied Trotwood into the lobby. They found Parkington and his two chums gazing mournfully at the notice. Trotwood ignored them, and pointed.

"Read it!" he said coolly.

"You howling ass!" roared Handforth. "Have you dragged us in just to read that notice? Don't you think we've seen enough of it? I'm sick of the sight of it!"

"Well, look again," said Trotwood. "It's quite an ordinary notice, on the face of it, but really it's made to order. We couldn't have wanted it better. One snip with a pair of scissors, and the whole sense of the notice is changed."

"What are you getting at, dear friend?" asked Parkington politely.

"Look here," replied Trotwood, getting down to detail, "you see the 'not' here? It's underlined, isn't it?"

"Very much so," agreed Handforth. "Crowell's way of emphasising——"

"Exactly," said Trotty. "But that one word—'not'—sticks out at the end of the line. Do you spot it? There's tons of paper on either side, and if one strip is cut off, the 'not' will go with it. Look here!"

Trotwood demonstrated. He put his finger over the fatal word, and the other juniors gasped. For the notice now read as follows: "This is to state definitely and emphatically that the boys of this House can go to the Leeds Test-match."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Parkington, closing and opening his eyes and gazing at Trotwood with deep admiration. "This fellow's a genius. It's not merely a wheeze, but *the* wheeze!"

"You're all mad!" said Handforth impatiently. "Of course the whole sense of the notice is changed by taking that word off, but you've apparently forgotten that Crowell isn't quite a raving lunatic. Do you think he'll be spoofed into believing that he's given us permission?"

"Not unless we pave the way," said Trotwood cunningly. "Reggie Pitt and I have been talking it over, and Reggie is full of ideas."

"In the first place," grinned Pitt, "I happened to overhear Crowell having a word with Dr. Brett yesterday. He was saying that his memory is wonky. Does things and can't remember them afterwards. Gives chaps lines, and forgets to ask for them."

"By George, I've noticed that!" said Handforth, with a start. "I owe him two hundred from last week, now I come to think of it!"

"It's as clear as daylight that old Crowell needs a holiday," continued Pitt. "The doctor as good as told him so. Look at his temper this morning. Like a garden rake! Until the new school opened he was only a Form-master, remember. Responsibility doesn't seem to suit him; he's worried and distracted. And that gives us our chance."

"Is it playing the game?" asked Handforth dubiously.

"Cheese it!" protested Pitt. "If we can spoof Crowell into believing that he's given us permission to go to the Test-match—instead of forbidding us to go—we shall be doing him a good turn. He'll be so worried that he'll take a holiday at once. And we want him to get well, don't we?"

"Well, rather!" chorused the others heartily.

Thereafter there was much plotting.

CHAPTER 3.

The Plot Proceeds!

"COME in!" said Mr. Crowell impatiently.

Handforth entered the study. Morning lessons were over, and Mr. Crowell was looking peevish. There had been trouble in the Sixth that morning, and the Housemaster had had a worrying hour. He

adjusted his glasses and fixed Handforth with a baleful glare.

"If you have come here, Handforth, to pester me——"

"Not at all, sir," interrupted Handforth. "I've brought the lines."

"Lines? What lines?"

"Surely you remember giving me five hundred lines this morning, sir?"

"Eh? Did I?" said Mr. Crowell, with a start. "Quite possibly, Handforth. No doubt you deserved them. Very well, give them to me."

Edward Oswald handed them over, and Mr. Crowell made a gesture of dismissal. The next moment he started, considerably astonished.

"Wait!" he said huskily.

He stared at the lines again. Several sheets of exercise paper were covered with them, and they were all exactly the same. The line ran as follows: "The more we are together, the merrier we'll be." Mr. Crowell was startled.

"Handforth," he said sternly, "is this a joke? Have you dared to play one of your absurd——"

"Joke, sir?" repeated Handforth. "Oh, that line, you mean?"

"Certainly it is what I mean."

"Well, now you mention it, sir, I thought it was rather a rummy thing for you to tell me to write out," said Handforth frankly.

"That is the exact line, isn't it, sir? Usually you make us translate Homer, or one of those other Greek beggars. So when you told me to copy out that rummy line——"

"Are you telling me, Handforth, that I gave you these absurd words to write down?" asked Mr. Crowell, aghast.

"Oh, really, sir!" protested Handforth. "You don't think I'd think of a line like that myself, do you? You must have forgotten, sir."

"Forgotten!" muttered Mr. Crowell, with a jump.

"Perhaps your memory is failing, sir——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Mr. Crowell sharply. "I have never heard such—— Oh, well! We'll say no more about it, Handforth. You may go."

He tore the impot in half and flung it in the wastepaper basket. Then he sat back in his chair, thinking deeply and frowning. Two minutes after Handforth had gone, another tap sounded on the door. It had to be repeated before Mr. Crowell noticed.

"Eh?" he ejaculated, coming to himself. "Who is it? Come in!"

Parkington entered, smiling cheerily. "Here you are, sir," he said, laying something on the table.

Mr. Crowell blinked.

"What is this, Parkington?" he demanded coldly.

"Your medicine, sir."

"Medicine!" said the Housemaster, startled. "But I didn't tell you to bring me any medicine, Parkington! What on earth do you mean by this?"

Parkington looked astounded.

"Do you mean to say you don't remember stopping me this morning, sir, as I was on the way to the gates?" he asked, giving Mr. Crowell such a curious look that the House-master felt uncomfortable. "Surely, sir! Don't you remember telling me to get a bottle of Dr. Blossom's Elixir for That Tired Feeling? I've been down to the village, and here's the stuff."

"Good heavens!" muttered Mr. Crowell, passing a hand over his brow.

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Nothing—nothing!" said the master hastily. "All right, Parkington. Thank you, my boy. I suppose I must have told you to get me this medicine, but, really, I have no recollection. However——"

He mumbled something and leaned back in his chair limply.

Nothing further happened until after lessons. Mr. Crowell, who had had much food for thought that morning, was gratified to note that none of the fellows now came



Mr. Crowell poked his head out of the window. A number of juniors were disappearing through the gates. Handforth & Co. were going to the Test-match against orders!

to him asking for leave to go to the Test-match. At least, he had definitely squashed that nonsense.

On his way to his study he encountered Harry Gresham.

"Will these do, sir?" asked Harry briskly, as he thrust some packets of seeds into Mr. Crowell's hand. "They're the only sort I

could get, sir. I don't believe they're quite the kind you mentioned, but Bellton's only a small place——"

"Wait—wait!" said Mr. Crowell hurriedly. "I don't know what you are talking about, Gresham! Giant vegetable marrows! Sunshine Glory parsnips! Who told you to give me these?"

"I'm not giving them to you, sir," said Gresham, in surprise. "Don't you remember handing me a shilling, and telling me to get mammoth vegetable marrow seeds and Golden Ray parsnip seeds? I thought these would do just as well. Jimmy Potts is out in the paddock now, digging up the ground in readiness."

The unfortunate Mr. Crowell made a curious sound in his throat.

"Yes, of course," he said thickly. "Quite so, Gresham. So I told you to— Curious that I should have forgotten the matter. What was that you said about Potts?"

"He's digging, sir."

"Oh, yes! Digging!" said Mr. Crowell. "Naturally! I—er—I think I shall change my mind about this, Gresham. Take me to Potts at once."

"Change your mind, sir?" asked Gresham wonderingly. "But surely you remember how enthusiastic you were about growing some vegetables of our own? Potts and I thought it a rummy idea at first, but—"

"Come!" interrupted Mr. Crowell desperately.

He was bewildered. But for the incidents of Handforth's lines and Parkington's medicine, he might have felt that his leg was being pulled. Yet what was the object? Already worried and harassed, Mr. Crowell took it for granted that he had been giving orders and forgetting them.

They found Jimmy Potts busy with a spade, and he smiled cheerfully.

"Getting on, sir," he said. "Got the seeds, Gresham? Good man! I wasn't sure about the piece of ground, sir, but you indicated this bit, didn't you?"

"Did I?" said Mr. Crowell. "Oh, yes! I suppose I did! Well, Potts, you can cease this digging. I have decided not to grow any vegetable parsnips or Sunshine marrows. You may both go. And—er—kindly say nothing of this to any of the other boys. You understand?"

They stared at him in amazement.

"But, really, sir—" began Gresham.

Mr. Crowell was walking away, but he hadn't gone far before he ran into Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, of the Third. It was only recently that these bright youngsters had resigned from Nelson Lee's Detective Academy—their parents concluding that St. Frank's, after all, would provide them with the better education.

"I've done it, sir," said Willy eagerly.

Mr. Crowell jumped. What horror was coming now?

"You've done it?" he panted. "What—what have you done, Handforth minor?"

"Why, don't you remember telling me—"

"Don't say that again!" broke in Mr. Crowell desperately. "I remember nothing, Handforth minor! I mean— It is most exasperating for you boys to keep asking me if I remember this, that, and the other. I

have something more important on my mind than your trifling affairs."

Willy shook his head.

"I don't think you're quite well, sir," he said, with concern. "This isn't a trifling affair. I mean, your own study—"

"My study!" almost yelled Mr. Crowell.

"Of course, sir," said Willy brightly. "Naturally, I thought the suggestion was queer at first, but I dare say it has its good points. You'll find everything in your study in perfect order, sir."

Before Mr. Crowell could ask any questions—which he was burning to do—the three fags vanished. Mr. Crowell took a deep breath, and he surprised many juniors in the Triangle by dashing headlong into the Ancient House at the double.

He raced to his study, flung open the door, took one look, and his brain reeled.

CHAPTER 4.

Getting Serious!

"COME in, ass—don't stand there!" said a brisk voice.

Mr. Crowell pulled himself together. This was appalling. On the top of his long bookcase stood three cages. The central cage was occupied by Priscilla, the parrot, and she was flanked on either side by Ferdinand, the ferret, and Rupert, the rat.

A quick chattering on the other side of the room drew Mr. Crowell's attention to Marmaduke, the monkey, who was chained up to a hook in the wall. Marmaduke was contentedly sitting on the head of William Shakespeare. It was a handsome bust, and one of Mr. Crowell's prized possessions.

"Great heavens above!" babbled the Form-master.

"Rats!" said Priscilla. "Go and eat coke! Why don't you wash your neck, you grubby fathead?"

"This—this is intolerable!" panted Mr. Crowell furiously. "The boy who is responsible for this outrageous joke—"

"Oh, here you are, sir!" said Willy Handforth lightly. "I thought I'd come along to see how you like it."

Mr. Crowell seized him.

"Handforth minor, how dare you?" he asked fiercely. "You—you unmitigated young rascal! How dare you bring your pets into my study? Of all the unparalleled impertinence—"

He broke off, for the expression of amazement on Willy's face was so profound that the Housemaster was beset with qualms.

"Impertinence, sir?" said Willy, in a voice of wonder. "I say, sir, you *do* need a doctor, you know. Weren't you telling me this morning how lonely you were? And what did you say when I suggested lending you my monkey?"

"I suggested—I mean, you suggested——" Mr. Crowell paused, speechless.

"Oh, I say, sir! Didn't you tell me that it would be a jolly good idea to bring three or four of my pets in here?" asked Willy. "Naturally I didn't think much of the idea at first, but when you undertook to look after them and feed them——"

"I?" gasped the master.

"Well, somebody had to feed them, sir," explained Willy. "I couldn't come dodging into your study at all hours of the day for a thing like that. I'm going to bring you all the necessary food soon. When you said that Marmaduke would keep you from getting absent-minded——"

"Handforth minor, take these creatures out of my study!" panted Mr. Crowell. "On second thoughts, I believe that they will—er—distract me too much. Take them away at once—at once! Now!"

"Oh, all right, sir. But after all the trouble I've taken——"

"I am sorry about that, but I really cannot think what I was saying when I told you to—— But no matter," said Mr. Crowell desperately. "Remove these animals!"

Willy removed them—rapidly. Later he joined his major and Parkington and a group of others in the Common-room.

"Working like a dream," he announced. "He was going to jump down my throat at first, but I spoofed him beautifully."

"My sons, this wheeze will succeed," declared Parkington. "If young Handforth could make Crowell believe that he asked for those pets in his study, he'll believe anything."

"It's a kind of auto-suggestion," grinned Pitt. "We've got him nicely muddled now, and he won't be surprised at anything that comes along."

One or two other stunts were put into operation during the afternoon, and by now Mr. Crowell was seriously thinking of going over to the sanatorium to see Dr. Brett. But he hated to admit—even to himself—that he had been giving all sorts of extraordinary orders to the boys and then forgetting them.

About an hour before calling-over—when it was Mr. Crowell's custom to take a stroll in the cloisters—he was startled to find the entire Remove standing at attention in the

Triangle. He was on the point of passing straight by, only the juniors saluted as one man. The absence of any other master caught Mr. Crowell's eye.

"May I—er—ask what this means, boys?" he said hesitatingly.

"We're here, sir," replied Handforth.

"I can see that you are here!" retorted Mr. Crowell. "But why are you here?"

"We don't know, sir."

"You don't know! What on earth——"

"Only obeying orders, sir," explained Handforth. "Surely you can't have forgotten that you told me to get the entire Form out here at six-thirty sharp, sir? We've been wondering what it's all about. Thought it

was some new sort of drill, perhaps."

"Did I—I mean, really, I don't remember—Drill?" said Mr. Crowell feebly. "No, Handforth, I don't think so. Perhaps I had something in mind, but it really doesn't matter. You may all dismiss."

They dismissed quietly and in an orderly fashion, looking very surprised. There wasn't the slightest hint or suggestion of a jape. Mr. Crowell walked unsteadily to the cloisters.

"Rummiest thing I've heard of for terms," came the voice of Biggles—"The poor old boy doesn't seem to know what he's doing."

Mr. Crowell halted, as though frozen.

"Memory's going, I expect," came Conroy major's voice. "Needs a holiday. Being Housemaster is too much for him all at once. I understand that he's been giving all sorts of orders, and then forgets 'em."

Mr. Crowell admitted himself beaten. He went straight to his bed-room, undressed, got into bed, and sent for the doctor. It was unfortunate—or perhaps fortunate—that Dr. Brett should have been called away on an urgent case that evening. In fact, it was so serious that he left word that he would not be back until the morning.

CHAPTER 5.

Bound for Leads!

MR. CROWELL lay awake for some minutes idly wondering what the time was. He could hear voices outside. The sounds floated through his open window.

BOYS!

LOOK HERE!

Magnificent Full-Page Photograph

of the

AUSTRALIAN TEST TEAM

in this week's

"POPULAR"

Now on Sale " " Price 2d.

The school clock chimed and struck four. "Good gracious!" said Mr. Crowell, jumping out of bed.

He went to the window and looked out. A number of Removites were in view, standing about with attache-cases in their hands, or with raincoats slung over their arms. Some were dressed in flannels, some in Norfolks. A cheery, holiday-looking crowd.

"Buck up, you chaps!" sang out Handforth. "If we're going to catch that excursion, we shall have to look lively!"

"Let's hope that England gives a good showing to-day at Leeds," said one of the others. "By Jingo, it'll be good if the weather keeps fine!"

"Rather!"

"Buck up, there—let's be off!"

Mr. Crowell was almost on the point of leaning out of the window and shouting. In the nick of time he realised that he would not cut a very dignified figure in his pyjamas and sleeping-cap. He was startled beyond measure at the audacity of these boys. In spite of his unqualified refusal, they were openly preparing to take an excursion to the Leeds Test-match!

Dashing across the room, Mr. Crowell found his dressing-gown and slippers. He put them on, removed his sleeping-cap, and tidied his scanty locks. He took a glance out of the window. There was an ominous silence. Not a boy was in sight.

There was an excellent reason for this. Mr. Crowell's figure at the window had not been overlooked. The juniors had deliberately shouted for the sole purpose of awakening the Housemaster. The sight of him was enough. Having made one or two general remarks about the Test-match, they made themselves scarce.

But they weren't far away. The whole crowd—and it numbered over half the Remove and a sprinkling of Third-Formers—was waiting behind the hedge, some distance down Bellton Lane.

"This is the real test," muttered Handforth anxiously. "How the dickens can we wait until Parkington comes?"

"Frightful suspense, dear old fellow," agreed Travers.

At that very moment Mr. Crowell was hurrying down the Ancient House stairs. In the lobby he found Kirby Keeble Parkington. The leader of the Red Hots was leaning disconsolately against the open doorway.

"Parkington!" shouted Mr. Crowell.

The ex-Carltonian glanced round.

"Oh, hallo, sir!" he said gloomily. "I didn't expect you down so early."

"Where are all those boys?" demanded Mr. Crowell sharply. "Those boys who were out in the Triangle a few minutes ago?"

"They've gone, sir."

Mr. Crowell seized Parkington by the shoulder.

"There shall be a heavy reckoning for this, young man!" he said furiously. "In defiance of my orders those boys have gone to the

Test-match. In the whole of my career I have never—"

"Here, wait a minute, sir!" interrupted Parkington, staring. "Did you say in defiance of your orders, sir?"

"I did, Parkington."

"But surely you've made a mistake, sir?" said the junior. "There's the notice on the board, sir, as plain as the nose on your face. You can't blame the fellows for taking advantage of your generosity—"

He broke off as Mr. Crowell tottered over towards the board. The Housemaster's eyes almost bulged as he saw the notice. It was his own notice, sure enough—his own handwriting. There it was, pinned up. And the message it gave out was unmistakable. With that strip of paper cut off, and the all-important "not" missing, the notice, instead of being a prohibition, became a permit.

The Housemaster swayed. After his experiences of yesterday he was ready to believe that he actually had written that notice. He realised that the permit would have to stand now, especially as the boys had gone.

"Really, Parkington, I—I feel quite run down," murmured Mr. Crowell. "I shall have to take a holiday."

"You need one, sir," said the junior earnestly. "I suppose you couldn't let me off that punishment, sir?" he added, in a wistful voice.

"Punishment?" said Mr. Crowell, with a start. "What punishment?"

"Didn't you tell me last night, sir, that I should have to stay behind?" asked Parkington. "It's a bit hard, when all the other chaps—"

"Forget it, Parkington," broke in Mr. Crowell, tottering away. "As the others have gone, you can go, too. I—I must go and lie down. I am feeling quite ill. And this very morning I shall go away for a rest. I need a change."

The leader of the Red-Hots grinned to himself as he sped like a hare across the Triangle. There was nothing really wrong with Mr. Crowell, except that he did need a short holiday. And by spoofing him like this the juniors had made up his mind for him.

"Well?" went up a chorus, as Parkington broke through the hedge.

"All serene, sweethearts," grinned the red-headed young giant. "It worked like a dream. We can go to the giddy Test-match and there'll be no punishment."

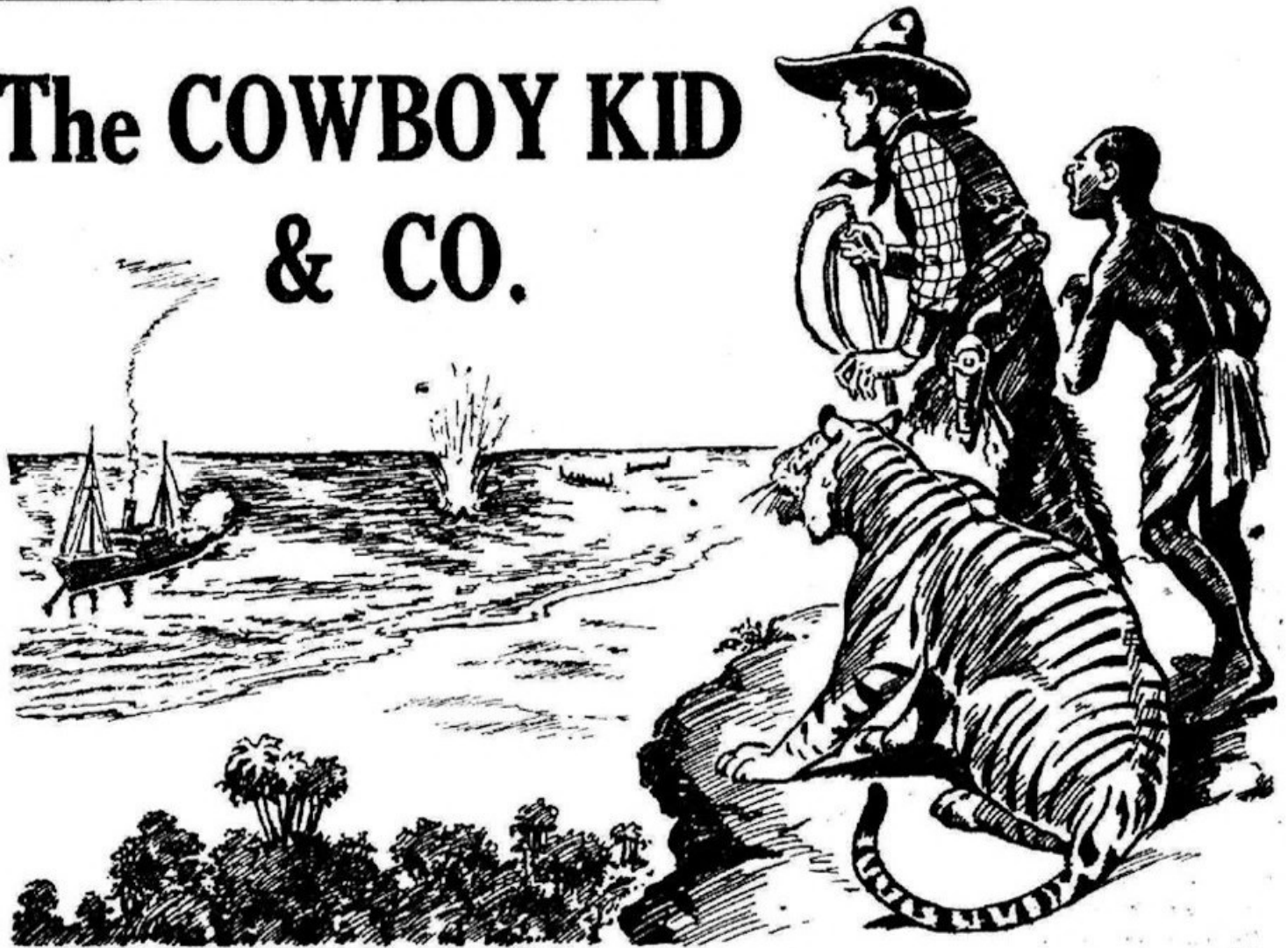
"Good egg!" said Handforth heartily. "Come on, my merry lads—the road that leads to Leeds is the one for us!"

THE END.

("Handy's Helping Hand!" is the title of next week's complete yarn featuring the Cheery Chums of St. Frank's—and it's a real scream from start to finish!)

Red-Hot Thrills In The Tropics!

The COWBOY KID & CO.



By the King's
Command!

BETWEEN 1,500 and 2,000 natives of Bangaloola sat or lay moaning in the blazing sun, their necks gripped in slave-forks, when King Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid, broke cover and marched into the clearing with Kiki, the black boy, beside him. Sheba, his magnificent pet tiger, prowled a little behind. At sight of the ferocious animal, the man in charge of the machine-gun crew from the slave ship—now anchored in the bay—which was guarding the captives immediately leapt to the murderous weapon and, kneeling, covered Sheba with it.

One second's hesitation on Loopy's part and his beloved tiger would have been riddled with bullets; but the Cowboy Kid leapt in front of her and waved a white handkerchief, which he pulled from his pocket.

The blacks, who were suffering agonies from want of rest, food and water, stirred hopefully as their king hurried by, looking a mere boy in his chaps, his chequered shirt, his flowing tie, his spurred boots and Stetson hat. Loopy Lane had saved them before. He might do it again.

"Waal," drawled the swarthy, bearded rascal who worked the machine gun, as the

Adventure No. 8:

KING LOOPY'S TRIUMPH!

"I'll teach those slaver-traders a lesson" says the Cowboy Kid—and he does!

Kid strode up to him, "what's your trouble?"

The Cowboy Kid handed him a letter, which the man opened and read eagerly. His eyes narrowed as he looked at Loopy suspiciously.

"This is from our chief, Quereto, right enough," he cried. "He asks us to release the slaves and go aboard our ship. We're told to steam away. That's funny. Quereto brought us here to load a cargo of slaves. He's no quitter." His voice rose savagely. "What have you done with him?"

Loopy grinned.

"Don't get fresh," he cried. "I took Quereto and his three slaver pals up the mountains to find some buried treasure. We found it all right. He's gone mad over it. Some of you saw the gold crown. It's nothing compared with what he found up there. He wants you to take the ship back home. He'll follow later. He's gonner sell her for scrap and retire from blackbirding."

The slaver scowled viciously.

"All right for him," he growled, turning the letter over and over, "but where do we come in? We're all on sharing terms."

Loopy answered with a shrug of indifference.

"He's gonner share out what he gets for

the diamonds and the rubies and the gold and the emeralds he's found," he said.

"He don't say so in his letter," snapped the gunman truculently.

Loopy thought it was time to show a bold front.

"What are you gonner do?" he asked. "Obey orders—or mutiny?"

Kiki's big eyes were set wonderingly on the Cowboy Kid. He knew from experience—for he remembered how Quereto had ravaged and burned and killed on a previous visit to the island—that the slaver's men would pay for it if they disobeyed him—when the slaver got back.

The bearded rascal folded up the letter and put it in the pocket of his dirty linen coat.

"Quereto wrote this right enough," he growled. "All right—I'll free the slaves; but you don't catch me steaming away from the island. I'll take my crew aboard and wait for the chief." He leered at Loopy cunningly. "If Quereto's got the treasure, we're gonner share before we leave Bangalloola, not wait till the ship's broken up."

He shouted orders which were repeated. Instantly the camp broke into feverish activity, the slavers hurrying about among the slaves and freeing them. As each man was released he leapt to his feet with shouts of joy, waved his crippled arms, and then limped away into the forest. Within an hour the last man had been freed.

The crew of rascals from the slave ship stacked the slave forks and dismantled the machine gun. Then, shouldering their rifles and carrying the gun, they trailed off and vanished, their leader saying they would come back for the slave-forks later.

King Loopy tumbled on the grass and mopped his perspiring forehead.

"Kiki," he cried, "it worked. The slaves are free. And in case those villains change their minds and come back, send out messengers ordering all the natives to take to their canoes and leave Bangalloola. There's danger for them as long as the slave ship stays here."

Kiki hesitated.

"Me not likum leavey keeng," he said.

"Don't you worry about me, Kiki," urged the Cowboy Kid. "I'm all right. I've got my tiger to stand by me. Think of all those black pals of yours and what will happen to them if that machine-gun scoundrel should change his mind."

Still Kiki lingered.

"Whatum happen to slaver Quereto and other nasty whitey men Keeng Loopy shutum up in cave on mountain?" he asked.

"Oh, they'll just have to stay there until I've saved my black people, Kiki," said the Cowboy Kid. "Now run along and send the messengers."

Kiki raced into the forest. Loopy waited in the shade of a palm, with the tiger stretched beside him, eating the fruit and the nuts he had gathered on his march down the mountain to the slave camp. The slavers came back and bore away many of

the slave-forks, bringing a couple of hundred scared Bangalloola natives to carry them. Twice they came.

"The rest can wait until the morning," snapped their leader. "And Quereto ought to be showing up then."

The Cowboy Kid grinned at his tiger. Quereto and his three principal officers were shut up in the mountain cave which he and Kiki had blocked up before they brought the letter down to camp, and were likely to stay there until Loopy let them out.

Kiki did not turn up again until the cool of the evening. He was excited.

"Kiki carry message," he whispered hoarsely. "All canoes makey ready. Black people leavey island. Keeng Loopy and she-cat comey see."

He led the Cowboy Kid through the forest and along a narrow trail which led to a high rock, from which Loopy could see the ocean shimmering in the light of the suddenly risen moon, day having closed in like the dropping of camera shutter during their march.

He could see the lights of the slave ship at anchor. And far away, crossing the main streak of shimmering moonlight, he made out a snake-like line that wriggled and curved as if it were alive. It stretched a mile or two. The Cowboy Kid laughed, for he knew the snake was made up of canoes, each one of which was carrying a full load of Bangalloola natives to safety.

Nobody on board the anchored slave ship seemed to take any notice. King Loopy waited until the snake vanished over the edge of the horizon, and then followed the narrow path back in the direction of the clearing. He yawned, for he was tired.

"Kiki," he said, "I'm going to sleep here. We'll go back to the city in the morning. Looks as if you and I and Sheba will be the only ones left in Bangalloola in a little while."

He stretched himself full length, using the tiger for a pillow. Kiki curled up at his feet. The drone of insects lulled them and their eyes closed. They slept until the morning broke in sunlit glory.

Shelled!

KIKI was busy breaking sticks to make a fire to cook the morning breakfast, when he stopped and uttered a choking cry. Looking in the direction indicated by the black boy's terrified eyes, the Cowboy Kid saw three men, wearing sun helmets and linen suits, run into the clearing.

"Steady, Kiki," he cried. "It's Quereto and his pals escaped from the mountain cave!"

Quereto caught sight of the Cowboy Kid, and, raising a revolver, fired point blank at him. The Cowboy didn't mind, for he had replaced Quereto's ball cartridges with blanks before he shut the slaver up in the cave. Remembering this, Quereto pocketed the

weapon and shook his clenched fist at the Cowboy Kid.

"Wait! You tricked me, but I'll drain your veins of blood drop by drop—when I bring my men back from the ship!" he shouted furiously.

He signed to his pals and ran towards Loopy; but half way he changed his mind, for he did not like the look of the heavy stock whip the Kid held in his right hand, or the lasso which looped down from the hook at the Kid's belt; also, he remembered the tiger.

rifles and revolvers, and they'll shoot at sight once Quereto tells his tale."

Whistling shrilly for his tiger, he managed to bring Sheba to heel after a long wait. She frisked her tail and licked her lips as she raised her noble head and turned her greenish eyes up at him.

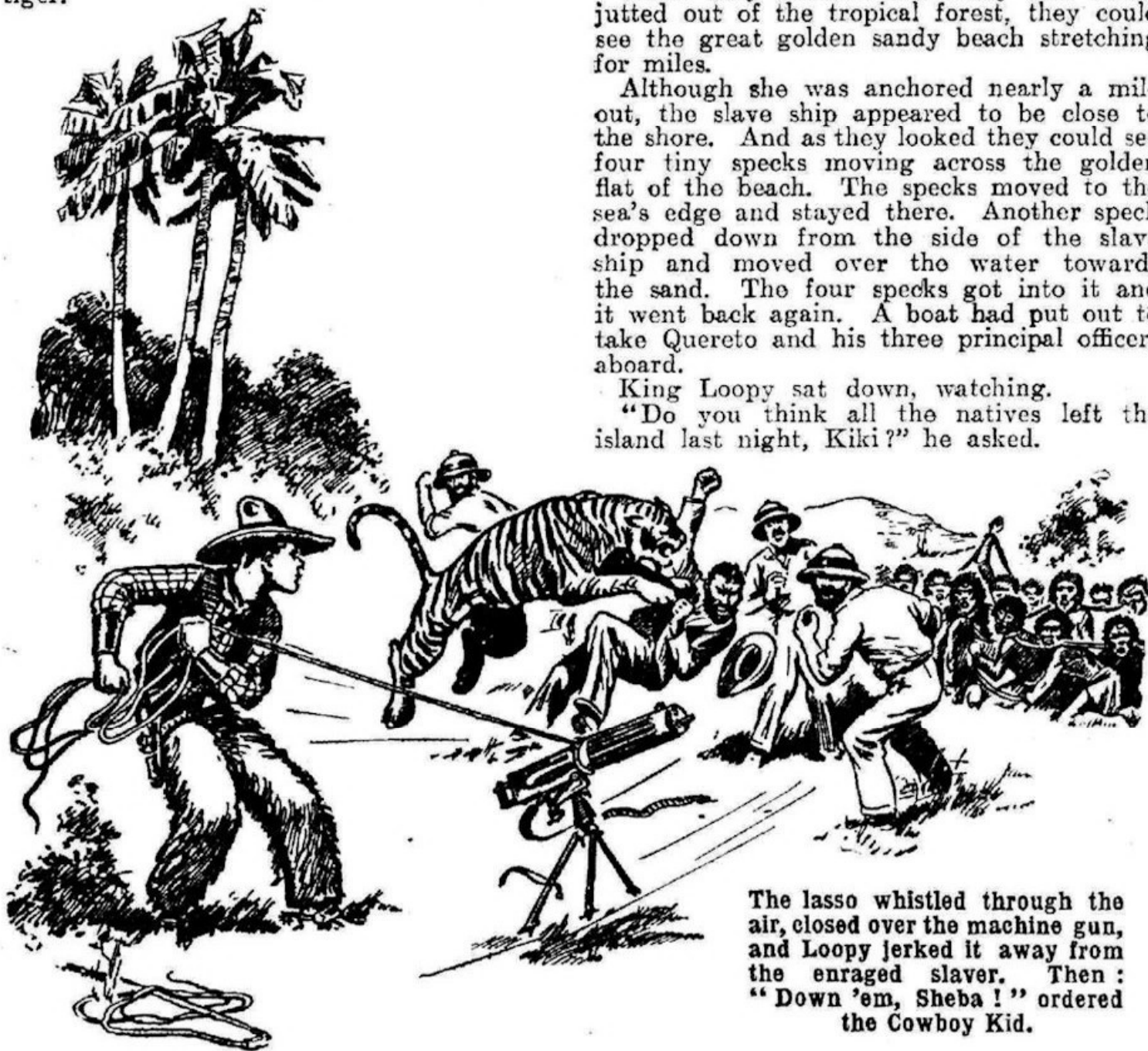
"You've enjoyed your meal, puss," said Loopy with a grin, "but Kiki and I will have to wait until we know what the slavers are going to do. Kiki, we'll go along to that look-out point and see."

When they reached the rocky cliff which jutted out of the tropical forest, they could see the great golden sandy beach stretching for miles.

Although she was anchored nearly a mile out, the slave ship appeared to be close to the shore. And as they looked they could see four tiny specks moving across the golden flat of the beach. The specks moved to the sea's edge and stayed there. Another speck dropped down from the side of the slave ship and moved over the water towards the sand. The four specks got into it and it went back again. A boat had put out to take Quereto and his three principal officers aboard.

King Loopy sat down, watching.

"Do you think all the natives left the island last night, Kiki?" he asked.



The lasso whistled through the air, closed over the machine gun, and Loopy jerked it away from the enraged slaver. Then: "Down 'em, Sheba!" ordered the Cowboy Kid.

"We'll run no risks—there's the cursed tiger!" he snarled to his companions. "Let's get to the ship."

So saying, he plunged down the hill and vanished among the bushes, with the others trailing at his heels.

There was bound to be trouble once Quereto reached the slave ship. King Loopy decided to send Sheba after the villains, but even as he called to her he found she was not beside him; the tiger had gone foraging for food.

"T'ki," he said, his lips setting grimly, "there's going to be a scrap. I'm not a bit afraid of Quereto and his slavers, but they've got that machine gun; they've got their

"Oughtey do," replied the black boy. "Muchee frightened."

But they had not all gone, for even as the Cowboy Kid asked the question he saw two or three war canoes round a point of the island and go paddling towards the horizon.

Far away as they were, he could tell that they were packed with natives. They moved swiftly, making for the open sea. Only a thin streak of smoke rose straight up from the funnel of the slave ship. It would take her a long time to get steam up. The Cowboy Kid laughed happily.

"Kiki," he cried, "they'll get safely away!"

But he spoke too soon, for a puff of white

smoke broke from the side of the slaver. Then the air shook and a loud boom set the drums of Loopy's ears vibrating. The Kid leapt excitedly to his feet.

"The cowards are firing on them!" he yelled.

Another boom echoed deafeningly; a third, a fourth, a fifth—and Loopy saw one of the canoes blotted right out of the picture. The others, scattering, made off in different directions.

"It's murder, Kiki!" muttered the Cowboy Kid. "Wouldn't I give something to get even with that blackguard Quereto!"

One canoe only was sunk, he reckoned; the rest had got safely away. Loopy decided to stay where he was. Kiki went in search of food and came back with calabash full of water, some fruit and some nuts.

As they ate the Cowboy Kid saw some specks drop down from the side of the slave ship and move towards the sandy beach. They were boats, and a crowd of smaller specks got out of them when they beached. Quereto had brought a landing party.

Presently Loopy heard the sound of shots, and a rattle which he knew was the stammer of the machine gun. The Cowboy Kid sprang to his feet.

"He's either trying to scare what natives remain, or else he's shooting them down in cold blood. I can't stay here," he cried. "I must do something to try and stop it."

Then a rolling boom rumbled from far out to sea. The Kid swung quickly round. The sky was just a sweep of cloudless blue; the ocean a great, still, shimmering lake streaked with molten gold.

With a gasp of astonishment King Loopy saw a fountain of water leap up from the sea not thirty yards away from the slave ship. It was followed by another boom and another splash. Then he knew.

"Kiki!" he shouted. "That's a shell from a big gun. There's somebody out on a ship at sea who doesn't like Quereto and his slaver. By George! Did you see that? That one dropped close in. The next one may hit her— Cripes! There she goes!"

Kiki rolled his eyes as the shell hit the slave ship right bang in her middle, sending a shower of splinters high into the air. The first hit on the target was followed by a second—and as flames and smoke burst out from the anchored slaver, she began to sink.

"Hurrah!" cried Loopy Lane excitedly. He picked up his stock whip and moved towards the forest. "I don't know who did it, but it's somebody who doesn't like black-bird hunters. Quereto is stranded on the island with his men, for they've got no ship to take them away. Kiki, let's go and find 'em. I'll teach 'em a lesson!"

Before they dived into the forest the Cowboy Kid looked back. He was just in time to see the slave ship sink beneath the sea. He shifted his eyes towards the horizon. The hull of a fast moving ship was just

showing up, a great trail of smoke spreading out behind her.

Homeward Bound!

WHEN they reached the clearing where he had freed the slaves, Loopy Lane looked out cautiously from behind a tree. It was just as well, for, not two hundred yards away from him stood Quereto, the slaver, and his machine-gun crew. The bearded rascal was crouching down beside the gun, which was trained on a double line of miserable wretches who were chained together with slave-forks, and who were kneeling in terror on the ground.

At the end of the clearing another batch of wretched Bangaloola natives, similarly linked, was gathered. Confronting them ranged a firing party of men from the slave ship, waiting for the order to shoot the black men down.

Pressing his finger to his lips and motioning Kiki to stay where he was, Loopy slipped away among the bushes with Sheba by his side.

He tucked his stock whip under his left arm and loosed his lasso, gathering it up in his fingers. Noiselessly, he slipped among the bushes until he came out behind Quereto. The man behind the machine gun turned and looked impatiently at his leader.

"What about it, boss?" he cried. "I'm just waiting for the word to riddle 'em."

Quereto laughed savagely.

"Why not?" he shouted. "The blackbirds are no use to us now. That must be Pirate Coulaman who's sunk my ship, curse him! He's after blackbirds, too. Well, he'll find 'em all dead. Fire away, Rego!"

The man's hand strayed to the handle of the gun, but before he could fire it a loop hurtled through the air and closed over the neck of the machine gun. Loopy jerked the lasso and brought the weapon hurtling back to him. As the man sprang to his feet with a curse, and Quereto turned upon his heels, Loopy gave the tiger her orders.

"Down 'em, Sheba!" he cried.

With a flying leap the tiger hurled her gigantic striped body through the air. Quereto went down under her, knocked clean out by her flying weight. Then she sprang at the machine gunner and flattened him before he had time to shoot her.

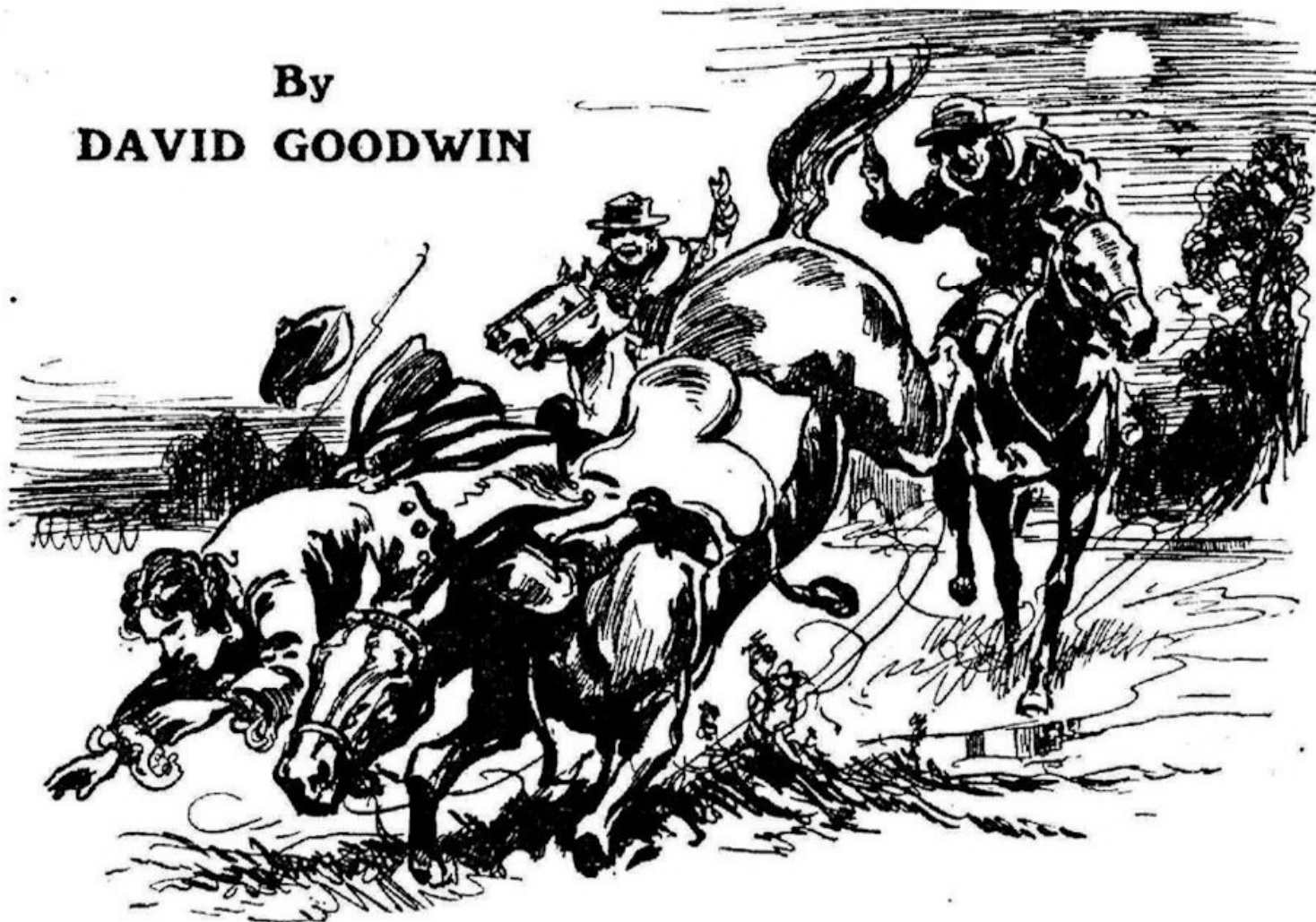
With a spring the Cowboy Kid lashed the others with his great stock whip. Then he righted the machine gun and turned it on the firing party at the end of the clearing. Sheba scattered Quereto's officers, who dived panic-stricken into the forest. King Loopy sent a spatter of machine-gun bullets just wide of the firing party as a reminder. They dropped their guns and held their arms high above their heads. One of them advanced to within twenty yards of Loopy.

(Concluded on page 43.)

START THIS MAGNIFICENT OLDEN TIMES SERIAL TO-DAY—SEE PAGE 40.

Knights of the Road!

By
DAVID GOODWIN



In the Shadow of the Gallows!

"DOG!" shrieked Vane, thrusting his head out of the

window. "You have sold your own neck. You have parted booty with a highwayman and stolen a horse, and, as there is a sky above me, I will have you hanged for it!"

"Take me with you, Dick!" cried Ralph.

"No, no, youngster," replied Dick. "I care not the toss of a biscuit what befalls me, but I won't bring you into danger. Keep a stout heart, boy, and do as you're bid, and I'll have you free ere long."

"You shall swing in chains for this night's work!" screamed Vane, shaking his fist. "I'll set the Riders on you, and you'll be taken before the dawn. Your cursed father—"

Dick jerked his horse up to the coach, snatched the whip from the coachman's hand, and laid it about Vane's head and shoulders till the man withdrew inside the vehicle, shrieking and cursing. Then, wheeling round, Dick gave a couple of smart cuts to each of the three horses, sending them off at full gallop, with the coach bumping behind them. The noise of the wheels and hoofs died down

In which young Dick Forrester joins forces with Turpin, notori- ous highwayman!

in the distance, and Dick found himself on the bleak highway with Turpin, the outlaw.

"Well, sir," said the highwayman, still laughing jovially, "you have burned your boats, as the buccaneers say. 'Twas a plucky deed, but yonder old curmudgeon will set the King's Riders on you, as sure as those guineas hang at your belt."

"The guineas are my own," said Dick, "thanks to you."

"The judge at Lincoln Assizes will think differently," said Turpin, as they turned and walked their mounts along the road, "and your uncle is plainly a man of power and position. It will be far from helping you when they learn at whose hands you took the guineas, for I am wanted in every assize-court in England. That horse under you is alone enough to condemn you by, believe me."

"I am a Forrester," said Dick proudly; "the Forresters do not hang."

"A Forrester of Fernhall?"

"Ay!"

"You will find they will hang a Forrester of Fernhall as high as any tinker that ever

stole a till," said the outlaw dryly, "though I do not deny you come of a brave race. Tell me something of this disinheritance of yours as we ride."

There was a careless, breezy good-fellowship about the outlaw that, despite the rascal Dick knew him to be, drew the boy's heart. Besides, he felt little more than an outlaw himself, driven from his home and hunted among men. He told Turpin many things of his history, and they rode far along the road, for the tale took long in telling.

"It grieves me sore," said Turpin grimly, at last, "that I did not put a brace of bullets through that uncle of yours when I had him at my pistol's-point. The world would have been rid of a very dirty scoundrel!"

Dick looked up suddenly.

"What comes yonder?" he said sharply. "I hear hoofs on the road."

The highwayman pricked his ears and listened.

"So soon!" he muttered. "They have lost no time. It is the King's Riders, boy. They come from east and they come from west, and we are hemmed in."

"The King's Riders?" exclaimed Dick.

"Ay," cried Turpin, spurring forward. "Now choose if you will die by a bullet or by the rope, boy. For if you fight they will hang you, and if you surrender they will hang you, and there is no middle way."

Even as he spoke, from either side came two bodies of armed horsemen, galloping between the high hedges of the lane. A commanding voice rang above the clatter of the hoofs:

"Surrender, in the King's name!"

"By the rood," said Dick, with a grim laugh, as his horse reared up at the sound of the pursuers coming, "it looks as though the curse of the Forresters is about to claim its own!"

"No time to talk!" cried Turpin. "Here, take this, and if you'll save your neck from the rope, see that you do not miss. I'll draw them after me, for the price of my head is the higher, and do you clap spurs to that beast of yours and ride for your life."

The highwayman handed a heavy single horse pistol to his young comrade, and the boy took it. But where he was to ride he did not see. The hedge hemmed them in, and the King's Riders came from both sides.

The leader of the captors had called his summons to surrender while he was still some way off, and as the two squads of horsemen dashed in from different directions, there was still a few moments grace. The highwayman did not waste them. The instant he had given his single pistol to Dick he whipped a long double one from his holster, emptied it at the two nearest pursuers, and then clapped his heels to his mare.

Dick looked on in amazement. He saw the two Riders lurch as the pistols spoke, and tumble out of their saddles in two woeful heaps; but what Turpin could hope to do the boy could not see. Yet, as soon as the highwayman was fairly started, he turned sharply at a part of the hedge that jutted out, and with a wrench and a spring the wonderful black mare skimmed clear over five and a half feet of the quickset hedge, landed cleanly on the other side, and was off like an arrow from the bow.

"After him," yelled the captain of the Riders. "Ride him down, fools! 'Tis Turpin himself, and there's five hundred on his head! Three of you stop and seize the boy!"

Six of the Riders immediately put their horses at the fence, and one, finding a gap, crashed through. He was instantly followed by the others, who all set off in full cry after Turpin's retreating figure, while the fugitive threw back a mocking laugh through the moonlight.

The other three rode full at Dick—one behind and two before. By all the rules of war it was madness to resist, but Dick Forrester's blood was roused to mad recklessness at the sight of the highwayman's dashing escape. With a shout of defiance, he thundered towards the two that came, from his front, to seize him.

"Surrender, you young fruit-o'-the-gallows!" shouted the one behind. "Halt, or I fire!"

Bang! went the pistol, and Dick felt the ball scream past his ear as he rode. At the same moment there was a scream of pain in front, and Dick saw one of his assailants topple headlong from the saddle. The man behind had fired, and hit one of his own comrades.

The other of the two in front pulled up hurriedly for fear of getting a bullet himself—

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast Fernhall estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle.

VANE FORRESTER, The latter refuses to give the boy his money and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

RALPH FORRESTER, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England from which, once they arrive there, they are not likely to leave. Travelling north by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

DICK TURPIN, the famous highwayman. Turpin robs Vane of all his money, but returns a hundred guineas to Dick when he hears the boy's story. Dick then leaps out of the coach and, cutting loose the leading coach-horse, jumps upon its back. The highwayman looks on in amazement. "Why, my young cockerel," he says, "are you going to join me on the road?"

(Now read on.)

for the fellow behind was levelling his second barrel—and roared out to him, in the name of all the fiends, to stop firing.

But by that time Dick had crashed full into him, and the boy's powerful coach-horse, as he plunged ahead, bowled over man and horse like ninepins. Dick galloped furiously down the road, pursued by the man with the pistol, who fired his second barrel vainly as he went. Coming to a gap in the hedge, the boy wrenched his horse through it, and struck out across country like a master of the hounds.

"After him!" screamed the captain's voice in the distance. "Don't let him get away, ye knaves!"

"Hurroo!" yelled Dick, as the wind whistled in his ears, and his horse's hoofs sent the turf flying. "Come and take me, he who can!"

He crashed through a hazel hedge, and went ahead at a furious pace, the heavy coach-horse covering the moonlit meadows in great bounds. In the rear thundered the pursuers, and far on the left flank Dick could still hear the hoofs of those who were after Turpin.

"Gadzooks! he's a plucky fellow, and he did me a right good turn," cried Dick as he galloped on. "If 'tis true it's the famous Black Bess he's riding, I'll warrant he'll lead them a rare dance. Had they all ridden at me I should have been caught and bound by now, and then, ho! for the black cap and the gibbet!"

Branded an Outlaw!

DICK very soon found, however, that he was a long way from safety yet, and, indeed, it was not till much later that he found how completely and utterly beyond the pale of the law he had put himself.

The King's Riders had bungled the first attack, thanks to Turpin's smartness and Dick's headlong dash, but they were no beginners at the game, and knew well what to do. In a very short time those who had followed Turpin, finding themselves outstripped by Black Bess, hurried back to their captain, who spread them out in a wide circle to cut off Dick Forrester's retreat, and close in on him. After a few minutes ride he nearly cantered right into the arms of two of them.

"That's the cub Forrester!" shouted the captain. "Nail him, lads. They'll pay well for him—dead or alive! Never mind the other, if you can get your hands on this one!"

A long, shrill hoot from a hunting-horn rang across the fields, and five horsemen came circling down upon Dick. He forced his beast to its utmost pace again, and rode straight for a small wood that lay on his right.

He crashed into it, startling the birds and the feeding rabbits, and in strong peril of being knocked on the head by a branch; but

he rode straight to its further border, and halted to listen.

Already he could hear the crashing of the Riders' horses as they entered, and the cry of one who was swept from his saddle by an overhanging bough. He had shaken off the bulk of them. But two came cantering round the rim of the copse, and before they could cut him off, Dick broke cover, and struck across the open again.

"Yoicks! Gone away!" shouted the two Riders, and they were instantly joined by a third. Dick's ruse, however, had disposed of the rest of the party.

"I've but three at my heels," he muttered, glancing back as he flew along, "though that's plenty to catch and hang me, if I fail to outdistance them. A plague on it, this beast of mine is floundering!"

The coach-horse, heavy and powerful for his own work, was showing signs of distress under this cross-country frolic, and the more lightly-mounted riders began to gain. Dick felt the priming of his pistol.

"I won't use it," he muttered, "if I can help it. 'Tis no sport to pistol a man, and they are doing their duty. I'd rather swing. Nay, I'll use the butt-end with a will if that will help, but I fear they've got me!"

Desperate as he was, Dick's stomach rose at the thought of shooting down one of his assailants. He was young enough to shrink from staining his hands with blood; yet there might be no help for it. Fate had driven him hard.

A ray of hope shot through him. Away ahead, under the light of the moon, he saw the cold shimmer of a river. He headed towards it, the Riders hot upon his trail, and thundered down towards its bank.

The autumn rains had swollen it to a heavy flood, and though Dick reached it at a ford, there was an angry, swirling rush of water coming past. It was far too wide to leap, being fifty yards across, and Dick drove his horse into it at once.

He fought out into mid-stream, and the pursuers, arriving on the bank, pulled up

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and hesitated. They called loudly on Dick to return and surrender, but a mocking laugh was the only answer. The leader of the Riders drew his pistol and fired at Dick, his two men following suit with more careful aim. The boy heard the whistle of the bullets, but the cold, dim light, and the background of the trees beyond, made accurate shooting impossible. The shots did no harm.

"We must after him!" cried the leader, thrusting his pistol back into the holster, and driving his horse into the water. "At him, lads! Once get across, and that horse of his won't last much longer."

Dick gained the bank, and the leading Rider and one of his men fought their way across the flooded stream inch by inch as he galloped off; but the horse of the third refused, and neither whip nor spur could make him face the flood.

"They're across; they're after me!" thought Dick, as he looked back; and he felt his own steed blundering along like a wounded bull, with neck outstretched.

He galloped along the bank of the river before turning inland, and suddenly, away on the right, he saw a third pursuer leap the river at a narrower place—a magnificent jump.

"He's got a good horse, yonder Rider," muttered Dick, "and this poor beast of mine is nearly done. They'll soon have me now."

The two pursuers who had crossed at the ford were not a dozen yards behind him now. Each called on the other to shoot, but both had emptied their pistols at the ford.

Then, with a lurch and a stagger, the coach-horse went down heavily, and Dick rolled along the turf like a shot rabbit.

Before he could move a finger to escape or defend himself, the two pursuers had flung themselves from their horses and were upon him. His horse lay dying beside him, and he was in the grip of those who would take him to the gallows.

"Hold him fast!" cried one breathlessly. "S'blood! How the cub fights!"

"Quiet him with a pistol-butt, Harry!" cried the other. "Quick, while I hold his hands! Give him a knock on the head and he'll go the easier!"

Dick fought and struggled like a wild cat. Twice he all but dragged himself clear of his captors, and thrice they yelped out in pain as his fists or his knees went home. But they mastered him at last, and one crossed the boy's arms beneath him while the other grasped a pistol by the barrel and raised it to strike.

"Cowards!" gasped Dick. "Put me on my feet, and I'll floor the pair of you."

"Give him the butt, Hal!" replied the one who was holding him.

The man with the pistol grunted fiercely, and raised his weapon to strike. There was a sudden flash and a bang, and the man with the pistol fell forward limply over Dick's prostrate body.

The other Rider jumped up with a frightened oath, but a great black shadow

whirled forward and was upon him like a thunderbolt. It was a man on horseback. The butt of a pistol felled the Rider to the ground, and as the stranger pulled up his horse with a jerk, a voice called aloud:

"Well, young-cock-o'-the-night, am I in good time, or have they cracked your pate? Ecod! You'll never be nearer the gallows-tree than you were then!"

"Dick Turpin!" cried the boy, shaking off the fallen King's Rider and scrambling up. "'Twas you I saw, then, leaping the river?"

"Ay, 'twas I," replied the highwayman with a laugh. "It did not take me all the night to shake off those shouting fools on their market-cart nags; and when they lost me I circled round to see how you were faring. Our acquaintance is short, but I have conceived overmuch liking for you to see you swing in chains so early!"

"I'm mightily obliged to you," said Dick Forrester, shaking himself. "I had just given myself up for lost. Let us see how the enemy has fared."

He turned over the Rider who had held the pistol, and started up with a white face. There was blood upon his hands.

"Heaven above us, Turpin, you have killed him! Oh, preserve us, but this is a terrible night's work!"

"Gadzooks, boy, is this all your gratitude?" said the highwayman coolly. "Pink me! What a fuss about a King's Rider! For me, I find them much too plentiful to mourn over the loss of one."

"And the other?" cried Dick wretchedly. "He's dead, too, or near it!"

"Forrester, my lad, you are monstrous squeamish for a knight o' the road. If I held my hand you would be on the way to the assize court lock-up with a cracked skull by now, with a stretched neck and a coat of tar to look forward to."

"Ay, but to kill a king's man!" groaned Dick, swallowing a lump in his throat.

"Well, give yourself no alarm," said Turpin, dismounting from his horse and examining the men, "for this one has no more than a bullet wound in the shoulder, and has lost consciousness. The other is but stunned by too sudden an acquaintance with the butt of my pistol, and will soon come to. It were best to finish them both off, lest they tell tales. There is no good King's Rider but a dead one."

A sudden anger rose within Dick. Turpin's callousness, his utter disregard of killing a man appalled the boy who, although reckless and high-spirited, was gentle of nature. He had heard terrible stories of the notorious highwayman, and now he was willing to believe them. His hand went to his side. With a flourish he withdrew his rapier.

"By Heaven, if you attempt it, I shall run you through the body!" cried Dick, springing forward.

(Will Dick and Turpin cross swords? On no account must you miss reading next Wednesday's enthralling instalment of this magnificent serial, chums!)

The COWBOY KID & Co.*(Continued from page 38.)*

"We surrender," he cried. "What do you want us to do?"

"Free those slaves," said the Cowboy Kid sternly.

The men were removing the last of the forks which imprisoned the Bangalloola natives when there was an echoing tramp of marching steps somewhere in the bush. A minute later a naval officer in tropical uniform, followed by a hundred armed sailors, swung into view.

King Loopy left his machine gun and, with Sheba by his side, went up to him. They talked.

He was in command of a gunboat, the officer said, which had been sent out to search for Quereto, the slaver. They had heard firing at sea, and a canoe they picked up full of Bangalloola natives supplied them with information as to Quereto's whereabouts. They had shelled his ship.

"We've heard about you—you're Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid, and King of Bangalloola, aren't you?" he said. "And this tiger must be Sheba the she-cat. Going to stay here?"

"No," replied Loopy. "I'm going home for a little while, though I may come back."

Quereto and his fellow slavers were taken prisoners aboard the gunboat. Their period of villainy had come to an end. Soon they would all be languishing in cells.

In the morning the gunboat steamed away from Bangalloola. On board were the Cowboy Kid and Sheba. With clouded face Loopy watched the waving palms and the long stretch of golden sand recede into the distance. He wondered how Kiki was getting along now—Kiki, who had left him with tears in his eyes; Kiki, who had implored him to "comey back sooney"; Kiki, whom he had left in charge of Bangalloola until his return—for Loopy did intend to return. To him the island was home, and, besides, wasn't he King Loopy of Bangalloola?

He spoke his thoughts to Sheba, who lay at his feet, and bent down to stroke her beautiful head.

The tiger yawned, roared, closed her eyes contentedly. She did not much mind where she went as long as she was with her master and friend.

THE END.

(A grand new series of complete stories starting next Wednesday, in which you will meet Dick Daring of Skinton School, and Dusty, his pet dinosaur. Laughs galore in these corking yarns—and thrills, too!)



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THE ISLAND OF SHIPS!

(Continued from page 20.)

join them, it is equally certain that Captain Angel would shoot me on sight. I don't intend to give him that pleasure."

"By gad, you're right, sir," said Mr. Adams.

NELSON LEE'S plans were not destined to materialise.

Night came, and with it the mists, as before. A complete silence brooded over the weed. Then, suddenly, it was shattered. Reports sounded—many of them—accompanied by a confused shouting.

Those on the Vulture rushed on deck and stood listening. It was obvious that something dramatic had happened—something unexpected.

"So soon?" muttered Lee anxiously. "Adams, I'm afraid that that dog, Angel, has forestalled us! Within an hour I should have been off on my mission of peace. And now this—"

"There is something boarding us!" ejaculated Mr. Adams abruptly.

He grabbed for his revolver, but Lee checked him. A slim figure ran lightly down the deck. It was the Girl of the Weed—her face pale with fright, her eyes full of appeal, her breath well-nigh spent.

"What is it?" asked Lee urgently.

"Oh, come—please!" she panted. "Those men have turned on us—on my father and all the others! Captain Angel says that

he's now king, and he means to rule us all. He has shot my father—"

"Shot him!" shouted Nipper, in horror.

"I believe he is dead!" sobbed Mary. "I saw him fall, and—and then I thought of you. They tried to stop me,"—she showed the ugly bruises on her arms—"but I wriggled away. They even fired at me. Please—please come!"

Lee's eyes were burning with fury as he now saw a deep, angry furrow in the girl's shoulder—the trail of a bullet. She had lost a lot of blood, and she was almost fainting.

"Nipper!" snapped the great detective. "Take her below and attend to this wound. And be quick about it, because there's other work to be done."

"You mean—" asked Nipper breathlessly.

"I mean that we're going as soon as we can prepare ourselves," replied Nelson Lee. "Captain Angel may think that he is master of the situation, but he has us to reckon with. And we have our own score to settle with him, too!"

THE END.

Next week Nelson Lee and the scoundrelly Captain Angel come to grips. Thrills—excitement—surprises—the next corking yarn in this amazing series is packed with them. Order your copy of the **NELSON LEE** in advance, chums, and avoid disappointment!

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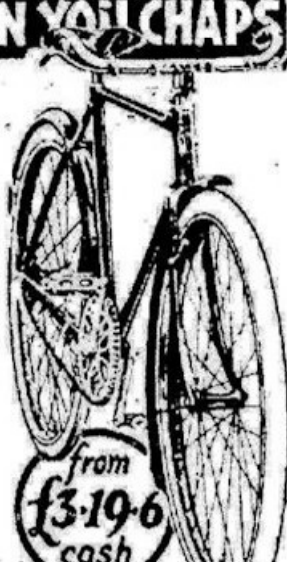
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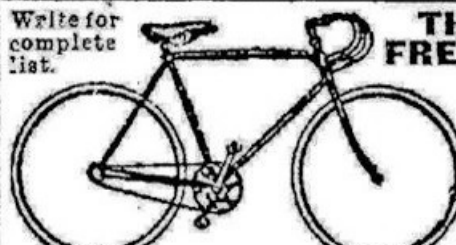
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